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TED WHITE

editorial

IN OUR FEBRUARY ISSUE, two issues back as you read this, but still on sale as I write, we published a letter by Daniel Tanenbaum in which Mr. Tanenbaum decried what he considered to be 'the high cost of the Hugos'. In my necessarily limited reply to his letter, I tried to provide him with some of the background information on the subject, but lack of space required me to hit the high points only briefly.

Mr. Tanenbaum's letter is only one of an increasing number of letters I've received from the readers of this magazine and those of our sister magazine, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION, on the subject of high costs at the annual World Science Fiction Convention. And the publication of Mr. Tanenbaum's letter has provoked even more—some of which you'll find in our letter column this issue. But the best of those I've received to date comes from Erwin S. Strauss—"Filthy Pierre" to his friends in fandom—and I'd like to present it to your attention here:

Dear Ted,

I agree with Daniel Tanenbaum's remarks about the high cost of Hugo voting. Separating balloting from convention membership would broaden the popular base of the awards by lowering the cost to only that necessary to cover the Hugo machinery. In earlier days, conventions needed the extra money that non-attending memberships brought in, and voting on the Hugos was by far the principal selling point for such sales. Now, however, the Hugos and the Worldcons can each stand on their own feet—financially, at least: the demise of the Hugo banquet as the highlight of the Worldcon would be a great loss.

I also agree with you that spiraling convention costs are a major problem facing fandom. I take exception, however, to making convention organizers scapegoats for this process. As you point out, the basic problem is one of size. Conventions suffer from reverse economies of scale: the larger one is, the more it costs per person. With conventions at their present size, most cities have only one or two hotels that can accommodate a Worldcon—these the largest and most modern (and hence most expensive) in town. Even major cities are lucky to have more than five or six. Knowing the limited choice available to the organizers, hotel managements aren't inclined to offer great discounts. You mention "little awareness" on the part of organizers of the impact of hotel costs on overall expenses. What makes you think that? The chairmen of the last several Worldcons I've attended have lamented these costs from the moment they decided to bid. In fact, many potential bids may have been aborted when the would-be organizers went into shock on hearing what hotel space would cost. But you can't blame committeemen for the facts of

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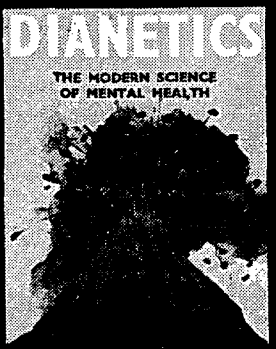

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A TASTE OF IMMORTALITY

ALEXEI PANSHIN

Illustrated by David Cockrum

For several years in the late 1960's there was an apartment that was really two apartments with the wall between knocked down, on West 16th Street in Manhattan, where most of the city's science fiction freaks and assorted others could be found at odd hours of the day and night. Fan meetings were held there, and pre-convention parties and just plain parties. Alexei Panshin could be found there too, upon occasion, and who is to say that the story he is about to relate did not indeed occur in that very place. . . ?

SMITH MET THE DEVIL at a party of science fiction fans, West Side witches and unemployables in a tenement apartment on West 16th St. To blend in, Smith took off his tie, threw his suit jacket onto a creative mix of comic books, monster magazines and old sandwich debris in one corner and kept his mouth shut. Nobody questioned him and while he watched he had three joints passed to him.

The devil was an over-sized slightly soft Negro with a spade beard. They called him Mike. Or maybe it was Mac. He was the one rolling most of the joints. In between he talked coven politics with one of the witches.

It took Smith a long time to make up his mind. At last he said, "Are you really the devil?"

"Sure," said the Negro.

"I want to bargain."

He might not have said that if he hadn't been stoned. And he wouldn't have been at the party if he hadn't been drunk.

In the morning he'd heard about Larry Stack and the napalm at Tran Dinh. Napalm. He knocked off work at two, which in itself was not unusual, but today he didn't head for the law library or the men's room or the back stair and he didn't leave a cover story. And he didn't use the time for job interviews. He headed for a bar.

Old Smith—no relation—was waiting for the elevator, but he didn't try to avoid him. Old Smith didn't say anything. He just raised his white eyebrows when Smith hit the elevator button.

"Out," Smith said. Our Smith.

"Out?"

"Out."

"What's the matter, Mr. Smith?

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Don't you enjoy working for Corning, Smith and Haymarket?"

"Screw," said Smith. "And shove your six-by-eight office."

It was a gray, raw, brooding, desolate day. Before he got to the bar, he was splashed by slush at a corner crossing and got his feet wet.

The bar was warm, too warm, but it didn't cut his chill. He spent the afternoon drinking but still felt cold. He only left at last because someone wanted to talk and wouldn't be discouraged.

"What do you do?"

"Nothing," he said.

"Come on. What do you do?"

"Nothing."

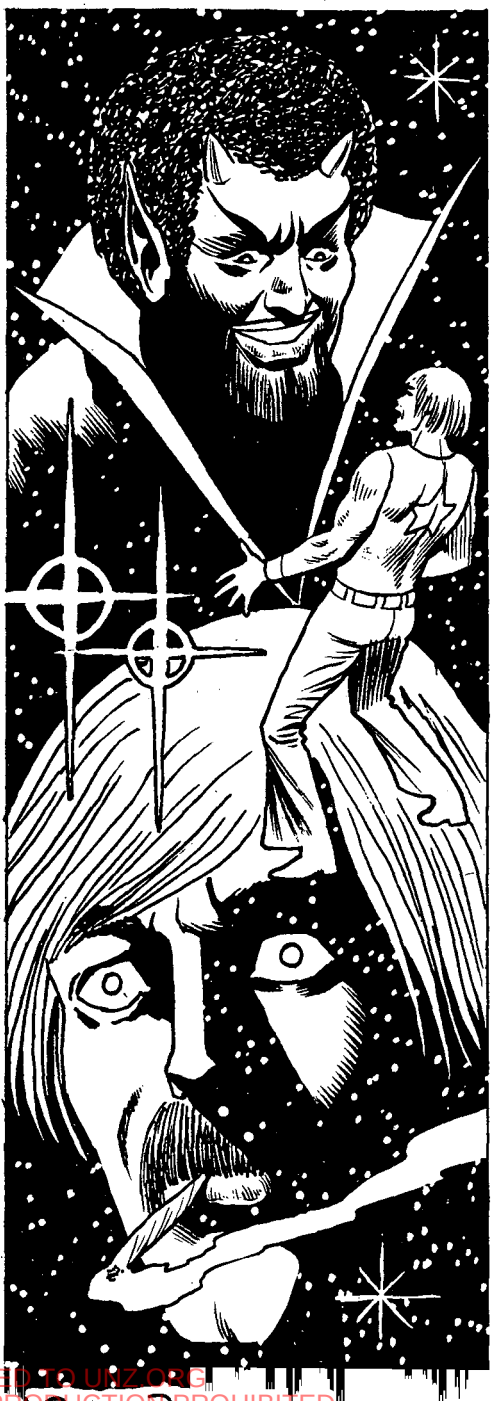
He was damned if he was going to talk about municipal bonds. So he left and walked to the subway and rode to Times Square to look for a pickup. When he got off the subway, it was dark and colder and the wind was much sharper. He stopped in Bookmaster's to get out of the wind and found himself in a conversation about science fiction. He didn't know anything about science fiction, he cared nothing about science fiction, but he faked beautifully. It made him forget the chill.

He nodded at a random name on a paperback cover. "Pohl, right? Good man. I mean, who would you pick?"

The kid looked incredulous. He had long hair and wire rims and yellow cavalry stripes stitched on his jeans. "Pohl? You must be kidding. He's Old Wave. Old Wave."

"Well, who would you pick?"

"Delany. It's got to be Delany. There isn't anybody to touch him."



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Smith looked properly dubious. "No," he said. "Try again. I don't know anybody who can get past the first chapter of a Delany."

He wound up compromising with the kid on somebody named Roger Zelazny whom he'd never heard of. Best science fiction writer in the business. Somebody the Old Wave and the New Wave could agree on. And sometime later he found himself at a party in a slum apartment on West 16th St. with a joint in his hand, surrounded by science fiction freaks and not quite sure how he had gotten there. But he did his best to blend.

The apartment was really two apartments with a hole knocked in the wall between the livingrooms. Nothing was new. Nothing was clean. The floor was covered with a carpet of trash and litter. There were rock and travel posters on the walls. The chairs were a mixed lot of refugees and the couch on which Smith sat was a bare mattress, cluttered and none too clean. Nobody identified the host.

The people were a motley, some a cut or two better than the surroundings, some not. There were a number of different groups with movement between. One of the livingrooms was dark except for a strobe light and a rock record was playing. The kid moved off into one of the other rooms in company with a girl. Smith continued to sit where he was in the better lit livingroom, smoking joints as they were passed to him, and listening to the conversation of witches.

He hadn't smoked pot before, but he didn't give a damn. He took what was offered to him and passed it on. He wanted to mess his mind. He wanted to get warm.

The witches were talking of Robert Graves and esp flashes and picnics in New Jersey. He floated and followed their conversation. There were three witches, all in their twenties or thirties, one fat, one pale, one stringy-haired, all properly witchy looking.

A boyish beard in a yellow dueling shirt with a can of Diet Pepsi in his hand stopped long enough to ask, "Will you be at the Anachronist Revel on Saturday, Arlene?"

The pale girl looked up. "Yes. I'm going early to help set things up."

"Can I get a ride with you?"

"Ask Mike," she said.

"How about it, Mac?"

"Right," he said, and passed up the latest joint. The bearded boy took a toke, nodded and passed it back.

The Negro was the one rolling the joints. He had the papers and the grass in a camera case. He made the decisions for the coven, it seemed.

The boy let out the smoke he was holding in his lungs. "You're a devil, Mike," he said.

The witches laughed. Mac smiled.

Smith thought about it for a long while, but it was still an impulse that made him say, "I want to bargain."

The devil said, "Ah, yes, Mr. Smith." Black as he was, he talked white.

"You know my name?" Smith said. He'd told the kid after they'd reached agreement on the merits of Zelazny, but he hadn't been introduced to anyone here.

The devil passed it off as something the devil should know. "What sort of

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a bargain did you want?" The witches watched attentively.

"Immortality."

"In return for your soul?"

"Yes."

"It's not much of a bargain," said the devil. "You are immortal. Your atoms will never be lost. As for your soul, that may be mine anyway."

"You don't have to tell him that," Arlene said.

"I'm feeling generous," said the devil. "And I don't want complaints."

"I don't care if my atoms survive," Smith said. "I don't want to die."

"But you will. The universe is a grindstone and everything gets worn away in time."

"I don't want to die. What point is there in living if you have to die?"

"If you don't die, what chance have I for your soul?"

"You can't give me immortality."

"Don't underestimate me, Mr. Smith. I don't think you'd enjoy immortality all that much if you had it."

"I would. It's what I want."

"All right. Let's strike a bargain. You get immortality as long as you want it. But if you change your mind, your soul becomes mine. When you change your mind. When you die."

"I won't change my mind," Smith said. "I know what I want." Then a suspicion struck him. "You wouldn't change me into something unpleasant like a rock, would you?"

"Come now," said the devil. "Do rocks think? Do rocks change their mind? We're speaking of you and immortality. Do you want it or not?"

Smith thought. "I want it," he said at last. "Where do I sign?"

"There's no need to sign anything. We'll both remember." The Negro reached inside the camera case and sorted through the things he carried there. He produced a small pink tablet. "Swallow this."

"You aren't going to say anything?"

"Modern times, modern methods. Swallow the pill."

Smith hesitated, and then took the tablet, threw it into the back of his throat and swallowed hard. He felt no different, except for the lump in his craw.

"I don't feel any different," he said.

"You didn't want to change, remember? But give it time."

Smith still felt the lump in his throat. He touched it. "I'm going to get something to drink," he said.

"Good idea," said the devil.

Smith stood. Between the alcohol he had drunk and the pot, his feet were unsteady. There was a layer of cotton batting between his mind and the world. As he moved toward the kitchen, he could hear the devil and his witches laughing.

There were two rooms between the livingroom and the kitchen. In the first room there was a small girl with kinky hair holding a plastic flower with translucent red and blue petals like stained glass. She was gesturing with the flower and talking animatedly, and punctuating with a dirty giggle.

"Look, as long as I'm going to Puerto Rico, one of you ought to pick it up. It's easy. You chart the city. Everybody has a different payday. And the flowers are easy. All you have to do is spend one afternoon a week dipping the wires in plastic. You can do the wires any-

(Continued on page 127)

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Denny O'Neil made his debut as an author of sf/fantasy in our April, 1971, issue with "The Iconoclasts." Since then he's sold stories to other markets in our field, and nailed down his position as a scriptwriter in the comics field (his bread and butter) with the Best Writer (Dramatic) award from The Academy of Comic Book Arts, the organization of comics professionals. Now he returns to these pages with a quietly compelling story about religion, superstitition, and someone called—

MISTER CHERUBIM

DENNIS O'NEIL

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

IT WAS THE NIGHT of the day of the miracle that my old atheist grandpaw found him rolling around in the mud behind the livery stable. He was naked as eggs and raving, Grandpaw said later, and so naturally the old man took him back to the Clarion office and fed him corn liquor. The corn made him sick. He was just finishing the dry heaves over the spittoon as Grandmaw and I returned from Benediction, dripping holy rain and full to the tips of our hairs with sanctity.

Grandmaw was hanging up her slicker, still humming *Tantum Ergo,* when she sniffed the corn and whirled, jowls quivering, glare fierce beneath the grey bangs. I could see she'd forgotten all about the Miracle that was pattering on the windows and turning Central Street to muck: a whiff of spirits could make that woman forget *anything.*

"Not me," Grandpaw said before she could sputter an accusation. He hooked a thumb in the general direction of the spittoon. "Him. And it was for medicine."

We saw him then, shivering in Grandpaw's threadbare campaign coat, his delicate hands swiping at the festoons of spittle hanging from his chin, his hard, ivory skin glistening in the kerosene glow. Even hunched over, he was plainly tall and bony-thin, and when he glanced at me, I got a chill in my kidney region. It was his eyes—flat, oval, the blue of fog.

"Appears to be a foreigner," Grandpaw said around the stem of a cold pipe. "Appears to be lost. Thought I'd better take him in." With his special innocent malice, he quoted, " 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.' "

Grandmaw said her usual. "The Devil can say Scriptures for his own purposes." And to me: "Amos, run fetch the sheriff."

Grandpaw caught my arm. "Our guest has done no wrong. No need to bring in the law, especially the kind

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of law we have in this town. Unless, mother, you want to have *me* arrested?"

She ignored the jibe. "The person's trash, anyone can see it. I won't have him under my roof."

Grandpaw grinned, showing his gums, and waved his pipe stem over his head. "Mother, this is *my* roof. I am the publisher of the Feeley *Clarion* and you are standing in my office. Now *your* roof"—he aimed the pipe at the curtained door at the rear of the room—"your roof is yonder, and I grant you full dominion of it. I'm sure you'll do me the same honor." Winking at me, again brimming with innocence, he added, "Seeing as how you're a good Christian and all."

Grandmaw's lips tightened and white spots appeared at the corners of her mouth. "Come, Amos," she commanded, grabbing my hand and pulling me toward the door. Pushing aside the curtain, she spun and said, "It would serve you right if he killed you in your sleep." Then we went into the house and I helped her shove a chest of drawers and a big, oak wardrobe in front of the curtain. That done, we knelt by my daybed and said a whole rosary, the five happy mysteries; an unforgiving woman and the boy that was me offering thanks for the blessing pouring from the clouds.

The next morning, as I was leaving for school, I saw Grandpaw and the stranger on the boardwalk that fronted the *Clarion.* Grandpaw was sweeping and the stranger, dressed in a ragged bib overall, was watching, those eerie eyes narrowed to slits—of concentration? Grandpaw handed him the broom. Clumsily, tentatively, the

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stranger swiped at the boards, hitting them too high on the straws, jolting the handle. He looked a question at Grandpaw, and the old man said, "You'll do fine."

I waved to Grandpaw, stepped from the shelter of the overhang, and walked through the drizzle toward seven o'clock Mass. We children stayed in church most of that day, repeating after Sister Matthias and Father Helm endless prayers of thanksgiving. Once, I dozed, and Sister whacked my forehead with the big ring she wore on her left middle finger: I bore a cruciform bruise for weeks. *Mea Culpa.*

Those nine hours of eternity did pass. I went out into the wet, grateful that a nice, long, temporal weekend was between me and Sister. Ahead, I saw Father Helm limping to the *Clarion.* Father Helm had been a chaplain in the Cuban war, had taken a bullet in the foot. Grandpaw claimed he limped a mite more than his modest wound warranted.

I arrived maybe a minute after he did, and already he was shouting. There were three of them in the office: the stranger, moving a broom in the corner, keeping himself near the wall; Grandpaw slumped in the swivel chair next to his rolltop desk, fiddling with his pipe; and Father, leaning against the press, his hurt foot stuck out stiffly, a page proof crumpled in his thick hands, shouting.

"I will not permit you to print this blasphemy," Father declared, thrusting the proof at Grandpaw.

"I don't intend to print blasphemy," Grandpaw answered mildly. "I never do. I print facts. Every so often, I might even come close to printing the truth."

"You call this truth?"

"I do, sir. That story says we've had a drought in these parts and it's over and everybody's happy, especially the farmers."

"You've not mentioned the miracle."

"That's because I saw none, sir."

Father straightened and began crossing and recrossing the space in front of the desk, listing and bobbing. "You spoke of facts, Mr. McLarney. All right, then, let's look at them. Isn't it true I got permission from the Bishop to say an extra Mass yesterday?"

"I'll accept that on hearsay."

"And isn't it true that not an hour later God gave a sign our prayers would be answered?"

"A sign? In gold paint or plain?"

"A *star* dropped from heaven. — God's own fiery messenger."

"Most unlikely, sir. If a *star* had fallen, I'd judge there'd be quite a lot of disruption hereabouts. I'll accept eyewitness accounts of a meteorite crashing."

Undaunted, Father continued, "Can you deny that suddenly the sky clouded and the storm broke?"

"There's precedent. We've had storms before."

"Not since last Autumn, Mr. McLarney. We had a snowless Winter and a dry Spring. We had a dry Easter Sunday." (The last referred to local folklore—no rain on Easter meant none for at least eight weeks thereafter, we believed.) The priest hesitated, and bellowed, "we had no reason to hope until the Miracle. What more evidence do you need?"

"Considerably more. Where you see

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a miracle, I see three unrelated events and a coincidence—a darn paltry coincidence. No sir, no miracles. But I'll strike a bargain with you. I won't do magic tricks with bread and wine provided you don't publish a newspaper."

Father hurled the proof to the floor and dragged his bad foot across it. He muttered through his teeth, "I'll pray for your soul, McLarney," and slammed the door hard enough to cause a couple of bits of type to jump from the composing shelf.

He may have prayed for Grandpaw, in private. In public, from the pulpit, he denounced the "heathen blasphemer." While I loved the old man as I've never loved anyone else, I agreed with Father: the magic trick remark had scared me to nightmares of sulphur, lightning bolts and pitchforks.

The attack hurt the *Clarion.* Local advertising became nearly nonexistent—the only businessman who continued to patronize the paper was Mr. Gottmeyer, the undertaker, Grandpaw's fellow skeptic. Circulation plunged from a thousand to four hundred, and most of the papers we did sell went to neighboring towns and villages via the wheezing train that paused in Feeley *en route* to the lead mines.

Grandmaw flaunted martyrdom like a hussy's spangles.

Grandpaw didn't seem to mind, though. He had a new hobby—the education of the stranger. That stranger, he *needed* educating. In just everything. In the beginning, he couldn't use a knife and fork; he couldn't dress himself; he couldn't hitch a buggy; he couldn't open a bottle; he couldn't speak any recognizable language—he could do exactly nothing, except stare ferociously and mutter nonsense syllables. But he was a fast learner. He quickly mastered the office chores, and soon he was setting type from Grandpaw's ornate script.

By then he had a working knowledge of basic English. I should say something about why I have not, and will not, reproduce any of his conversation verbatim. It's because I can't. His speech was cotton candy—melted in the ear the instant it was spoken. Although I can remember the substance of his communications, I can summon neither the precise words and sentences, nor the tone. Possibly, the voice was high, chirping, like the voice of a man who has gulped helium: and possibly, my mind fabricated a sound to match face and form and thus satisfy the demands of memory. I *will* testify that he did converse, pleasantly: I recall him nodding to ladies on the street, accepting Mr. Gottmeyer's laboriously pencilled copy, communicating the paper's needs to Grandpaw—all activities requiring speech. Yes, he talked, no question of it: Feeleyites are hostile to taciturn outsiders, and they were not hostile to the stranger. I can't doubt he maintained the usual sort of Feeley banter, which consisted of ritual comments regarding whether or not the sun was shining.

When Grandpaw got from him a name, it must have sounded like the murmur of a coffee percolator, like "K-hr-yubrm." Grandpaw was delighted.

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"I *knew* you were quality," he crowed, squeezing the stranger's biceps. "I should have spotted you for an angel right off. You're *Cherubim*—my friend and valued aid, Mister Cherubim."

Grandmaw was horrified. This was final proof of her husband's hopeless evil and certain damnation, this taking of the heavenly choir's name in vain. She exiled them both: I don't think she and Grandpaw ever shared a bedroom again. Grandpaw and Mr. Cherubim had meals at Mrs. Eichel's boarding house and slept on the Clarion's floor.

Probably, Grandpaw didn't miss her company. Their relationship had always been rather formal—I can only guess that some mad month of youthful sexuality had bound them in their truce of a marriage. He surely didn't *appear* to miss her: on the contrary, he appeared to be uncommonly chipper. He and Mr. Cherubim were constant companions, taking leisurely walks after dinner, conducting secretive conferences, pouring over the books Grandpaw kept in his double-locked trunk. Grandpaw's winks became broader, his humor livelier, his laughter bawdy. He began to smoke his pipe indoors, and he stopped being furtive about his visits to the still south of town.

The winter of 1913, that was—Grandpaw's time of joy.

But as Grandmaw always said, joy in this life does not endure. Spring came, and with it, plans to build a shrine commemorating the Miracle—a chapel, Stations of the Cross, and maybe picnic tables for weary pilgrims. The idea was Father Helm's, of course, and it kindled immediate enthusiasm in everyone. Including, to my surprise, Grandpaw.

"We'll be able to snag tourists from St. Louis and Memphis," he explained. "Get the county to build a decent highway or two. The thing could be a real push for Feeley."

So, for the first time, pulpit and paper united. Father's campaign to solicit contributions was praised in the *Clarion's* editorial section, and on page one Grandpaw published signed articles detailing the progress of the fund and urging all and sundry to add whatever dollars they could spare. Finally, he astonished us by announcing that he, Oscar T. McLarney, would personally pay for a statue to adorn the proposed chapel.

"I tucked away a few hundred I got for graduating from college," he said. "Money's been sitting in a bank, collecting dust and interest. Ought to be a sizable sum by now. Buy a handsome piece of statuary."

He sent Mr. Cherubim to St. Louis to negotiate the purchase. The trip from Feeley to the city normally took a couple of days, but at the end of a full week, Mr. Cherubim hadn't returned. Grandpaw didn't seem worried. Every morning, he strolled to the site where the shrine was slowly rising. He'd stand among the sawdusty tree stumps watching the sweating volunteers, puffing his pipe and offering judicious suggestions—"You'll want more leverage there, son"—"Might consider mixing that cement thicker"—for all the world like a Pharaoh supervising the erection of his private monument. His suggestions were generally bad: I know, because

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I was one of the volunteers, released from school a month early and freed from office duties for the duration. The labor was pretty brutal for a skinny thirteen-year-old used to lifting nothing heavier than a stick of type, but I was yet a fervent Catholic, anxious to serve the Lord, and eager for the lunches brought by budding Weesie Slinkard, the apple—no, *orchard*—of my eye.

A comradeship developed between Grandpaw and Father Helm. Maybe the priest was mellowing: it's certain he was ageing, withering like a sheet of newsprint in an oven. He may have faked the limp: he could not have faked the quarter-sized liver blemishes on his arms, the tic in his cheek, the yellowish pallor of his skin. Whatever the reason, he spoke deferentially to Grandpaw, and my grandfather returned his courtesy. They would stand together, a pair of immaculate patriarchs, and observe timber and stone melding to a recognizable miniature cathedral.

I listened to them talk:

"I'm pleased at your turn of heart," said the priest.

"My heart occupies the usual position in my chest," said Grandpaw.

"You are not trained to recognize the presence of grace," said Father. "I am."

"I assume you refer to my interest in your . . . project," said Grandpaw.

"The Lord moves in mysterious ways," recited the priest.

"Father Helm, a shrine can have different meanings. You look upon this building we're doing as a testament to your creed and I consider it a confirmation of mine."

"What *is* the faith of an atheist, Mr. McLarney?"

For a moment, Grandpaw contemplated the clouds. His reply was careful and sombre. He said, "I believe reality is big and terrifying and surprising. I resent simple explanations of it—describing it as a puppet stage with a bearded fella pulling the strings. I insist on giving the universe due credit for wonder and terror."

"The Church recognizes mysteries," said Father.

"Recognizes and dismisses them in the same breath. Me, I cherish mysteries, and I don't want a Deity to tame them. Why argue? Instead, let's each enjoy such comfort as we can."

Saturday, I heard that exchange. Monday, I heard another. Mr. Cherubim had returned by overland coach at dusk and, as usual, he and Grandpaw began setting the back page of the week's edition after supper. I was in the kitchen, idly paging through one of the scientific magazines Grandpaw subscribed to, when I became aware of a muted argument in the office. Grandpaw's exclamations rapped the evening quiet:

". . . you can't go . . . your duty be damned . . . been around me, know what liars journalists are . . . fool . . . war brewing in Europe . . . need you . . . throw religion in their faces . . . ungrateful bastard . . ."

A few minutes later, Grandpaw stomped past me without a greeting, a jug hugged to his chest, and continued out back. I got up and went into the office. Mr. Cherubim was bent over

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the composing table, leading a column.

"Want any help?" I asked.

He didn't.

I saw a newspaper on the desk, not the *Clarion,* and sauntered very casually to it. It was the *St. Louis Post,* and on the sheet was a single story, wedged between display ads for Colt revolvers and Magruder coal stoves. Marvelous, marvelous story, deserving better than being lost among pistols and stoves. Madame Marie Curie, it told me, had co-discovered an invisible energy she termed X-Rays—discovered these phantoms sixteen years earlier in Paris, France, and now American scientists were predicting fantastic uses for them, such as curing diseases and looking into bellies. My mind quaked. I forgot Grandpaw's wrath, bid Mr. Cherubim goodnight, and sought privacy for a thirteen-year-old's enormous speculations.

I arrived at the site early the following afternoon, to find my grandfather swinging a pick—yes, swinging a pick. No more was he the aloof supervisor: he had chosen the lot of the laborer. I didn't feel the choice sensible, and told him. Pick-axing was no work for a man edging sixty-six.

"Way you children are going," he panted, "the thing'll never get done."

We worked side by side that hot May afternoon, axing and chopping and lugging blocks of stone up shaky ladders. My spine ached, my limbs quivered, sweat bit my tear ducts. I desperately wanted to quit, surrender to a shade tree. But I didn't dare, not while a man a lifetime-plus my elder showed no sign of weariness other than a loud, rasping pant.

I became aware that the rasping had stopped. I looked down. Grandpaw was sprawled in the clay dust, arms outflung, bluish fingers clawing feebly, left leg twitching.

We carried him to the *Clarion,* passing Mr. Cherubim, who was locking the front page into the press, and lay him in the big brass bed. Dr. Lieber came and ordered me away. Leaving, I brushed by Grandmaw, and suddenly hated her.

Father Helm led me to church. I wrapped myself in shadow and tried to plead with the plaster image which hung uncaring and distant in the twinkling of a vigil light, somewhere beyond the altar rail.

And it was night, and I was walking home, alone. Pleasant night, that was—cool, rustling, moonlit. I found myself thinking of Weesie Slinkard and my loins stirred and then I shuddered, guilty and shamed.

Mr. Cherubim stepped from the darkness. He wore the bib coverall, and there was a parcel wrapped in the *Clarion* tucked beneath his arm.

"My grandfather?" I asked.

Falling in step beside me, he said Grandpaw had suffered a massive coronary. Dr. Lieber thought the old man might survive if he lived until morning.

We walked on silently.

He spoke without prompting, for no purpose I could understand. He told me who he was and murdered my faith and forced me to be my grandfather's creature—cynical, doubting, lonely, and occasionally brave and merry. Listen, he said. Hear my truth and forsake your God.

He came from a distant place, one

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not on any map of our world. His mission was to deliver a message for our people from his own—an urgent warning. What it was, he had forgotten. For he had committed an error—did he say sin?—and lost control of the energies which had carried him, and loosed great heat in the sky above our town, and the heat condensed water and caused the rain we called Miracle. Dazed and in shock, he had plummeted down into the mud where my grandfather found him, and when the shock was gone, so too was the message. He had endured our savagery and stupidity, checking his despair, hoping—did he say praying?—to find a way off our planet, until he learned of Madame Curie. He would cross the ocean, seek the Frenchwoman—

"You can't leave *now,*" I blurted.

—seek Curie, for it was remotely possible she had the apparatus and knowledge he required to leave the Earth and voyage to his distant kin.

"Grandpaw's *dying,*" I cried. "You're his friend."

But he was not. He was a messenger, and he had to be about his task. He moved into the darkness again, saying he was not of our kind, and was gone.

I've often wondered how important that message was. I suppose it's lost forever. He is. Maybe he was a victim of German warships. Maybe he met Madame Curie, inspected her crude toys, and died miserable in a Parisian cellar. Or maybe he reached the far place, and decided the journey back wasn't worth the effort. Wondering is futile. Still, I do anyway, particularly when I'm editing the wire copy we fill the second section of the *Clarion* with, the space not devoted to essential news—traffic violations, socials, births, deaths. Big city papers put the wire stuff up front, and hang black headlines on top, screamers about nuclear war and overpopulation and pollution, and so forth. Those editors have their priorities, I have mine. Your choice: is a summit conference more newsworthy than a birth?

We never saw the Cherubim flesh after the night of Grandpaw's stroke. But nobody in Feeley can forget him, not as long as the shrine and attendant myth rule our lives and much of our commerce.

The goddam filthy chapel was finished on schedule. Huge celebration. Balloons, hot dogs, more automobiles than I'd imagined existed jamming Center Street—and the main attraction, the Bishop, mitred, sceptred and benevolent as the holiest medieval prince in the breviary.

I wheeled the drooling, limp thing my grandfather had become through the crowd. Grandmaw trailed us, her head high, proud. I heard whispers—he had been touched by the miracle, he would enter heaven—and I fought the urge to run, leave the convert to the gawkers' Christian mercies. He stank, I had to care for him, and he wasn't *my* Grandpaw.

Father Helm addressed the crowd, his quavering voice suggesting his responsibility for the Almighty's meteorology. The Bishop spoke, remarking on the holiness of the ground upon which we stood, this chunk of *his* diocese. The heap in the wheelchair wasn't listening. Nor was he seeing the statue he had bought, leaning at an angle

(Continued on page 113)

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Robert Toomey's last appearance here was with "Directions into the Darkness" (August, 1970) but after a too-long absence (and a move from the cold grime of the East Village to the sunnier climes of Florida), he returns with a Kafkaesque vignette about a man from—

SECTION-I

ROBERT TOOMEY, Jr.

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

THE EXPECTED SOUND of insistent knocking awoke him. He swung out of bed, shrugged on his candystripe bathrobe, and went to answer the door.

A slender man stood in the hallway, wearing a dark gray business suit and a snapbrim hat. The face beneath the hat was cleancut and youthful without being young.

"John Ransom?" the man said.

"Yes?"

"Macgregor," the man said, flipping an alligator ID packet open and shut. "Section-I, Intelligence."

Ransom pushed the hair out of his eyes and cleared his throat. "I haven't done anything," he said in a furtive tone.

"Did anyone say that you had?"

"Well, no."

"Of course not," Macgregor said heartily, his eyes as cold as a junkie's gonads. "We'd just like to ask you some questions."

"Questions?"

"Questions."

"About what?"

"Oh, this and that."

"But it's four o'clock in the morning."

"We try to catch people at home." Macgregor smiled a smile that began and ended with his teeth. "May we come in, Mr. Ransom?"

"Section-I, you say?"

"Intelligence," Macgregor said, placing the palm of his hand flat against the door, just below the peephole, and shoving it the rest of the way open. "Do you mind?"

"Uh, no," Ransom said nervously. "No."

"Or, uh, do you?" Macgregor was mocking him.

"No."

"You're sure?"

"No—I mean, yes."

"You don't sound sure."

"I am."

"But are you positive?"

"Yes."

"That's good." Macgregor patted Ransom lightly on the back. "We'd hate like hell to inconvenience you."

"I had to get up anyway, to answer the door."

Macgregor stopped patting. "Is that supposed to be a joke?"

"It's an old one, I'm afraid."

"Don't be afraid."

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"I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry."

"Sorry."

"Don't be."

"Sorry."

Ransom led Macgregor into the livingroom. Macgregor sat down in a comfortable chair, crossed his legs with attention to trouser creases, took out a small spiral bound notebook, held up a ballpoint pen.

"Writes in any position," he said proudly, "and also under water."

"I have one like that."

"The Apollo Model?"

"The ICBM."

"Obsolete," said Macgregor, tossing his pen in the air. "I admire your taste in furnishings."

"Thank you."

"These beautiful bright green walls."

"My wife painted them."

"And that painting."

"My wife chose it."

"Beautiful—what does it represent?"

"Envy," said Ransom.

"Goes very well with the walls." Macgregor picked his pen up off the carpet and shook it. "Shockproof," he said. "The standard issue in Section-I." He started to write something in his notebook and frowned. "Hummm. I seem to have run out of ink."

"Here," Ransom said. "Use mine."

"The ICBM?"

"Uh-huh."

"Obsolete," Macgregor said, still frowning. "But I guess it'll have to do." He took it. "You're divorced, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"How long?"

"It became official six months ago."

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"Are you happy about it?"

Arranging his bathrobe around himself, Ransom sat down on the edge of a sofa.

"It was what she wanted," he said.

"Her name?"

"Mary."

"Maiden name?"

"Smith."

"Mary Smith. Mary Smith. Mary Smith." Macgregor smiled with his teeth again. They were jaundice yellow. "Has the ring of an alias."

"I assure you it's not," said Ransom.

"Smith."

"That's right."

"Would you spell it for me, please?"

"S-m-i-t-h."

"Just for the record." Macgregor made a mark in the notebook. "Spell Mary."

"M-a-r-y."

"We like to get these things correct." Another mark in the notebook. "Good pen."

"You can keep it."

"I will." Macgregor clicked the pen twice. "Did your wife have a middle name?"

"None that I know of."

"Might she have had one that you didn't know of?"

"It's possible."

"But not likely?"

"No."

"And if she did, you didn't know it."

"No."

Macgregor turned a page in the notebook. "Ah, here we are. Her middle name was Lucinda. Altogether her maiden name was Mary Lucinda Smith. I guess you didn't know that."

"No," said Ransom. "I guess I didn't."

"Spell Lucinda."

"L-u-c—" Ransom broke off. "You have it right there, don't you?"

"Do I?"

"Don't you?"

"Come and see."

Ransom got up and crossed the room. Macgregor showed him the notebook. The page he had turned to was blank. He grinned hugely. His breath was death. Ransom stepped back.

"Is it—is it my wife you're after?"

"Why?" said Macgregor. "Would you like to help us get her?"

"For what?" Ransom's voice was desperate.

"Whatever we can get her for." Macgregor winked obscenely. "I'm certain we can think of something."

"We can't," Ransom said.

"Why not?"

"I love her."

"Still?"

"And always."

"Touching," said Macgregor. "Well, relax. We're not 'after' her, as you put it."

"I don't understand," said Ransom.

"Don't even try." Macgregor turned the page again. "Any children?"

"Two."

"Boys or girls?"

"One of each."

"Their names?"

Irritation crept into Ransom's tone like the scrape of a shoe sole with shit on it against a sidewalk. "Patrick and Susan," he said. "P-a-t-r-i-c-k, Patrick. S-u-s-a-n, Susan. We also had a dog. His name was Spot. Here, Spot, we

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used to say. See Spot run and jump. S-p-o-t, Spot."

"Very good, Mr. Ransom." Macgregor made marks in his notebook.

"While you're writing, could I offer you a cup of freeze-dried coffee?"

"I never drink coffee."

"A cola?"

"I avoid it like the plague."

"Some cynopep tea?"

"Ho ho," said Macgregor. "You've hit upon my fatal weakness."

"Sugar?" said Ransom.

"Perhaps a pinch."

"A pinch?"

"Oh, make it a smidgen." The smile came and went. "I can cheat on my diet just this once."

"Maybe you shouldn't."

"Think so?"

Ransom appraised him. "On the other hand, maybe you should."

"Okay," said Macgregor. "But just this once."

"Milk, cream, lemon concentrate?"

"None of the above."

Ransom nodded, went into the kitchenette, prepared the tea, and brought it back. He set a blue tinted china cup and saucer down on a table beside Macgregor and poured from a steamy aluminum teapot. Then from a blue tinted china serving bowl he spooned out a smidgen of pure white cane sugar. Macgregor took a sip.

"Delicious," he said. "But aren't you having any?"

"I get gas at this hour," said Ransom.

"Pity." Macgregor regarded his notebook. "Well, now to your sex life. I hope you won't be offended."

"I'm past all that."

"Fine." Macgregor took another sip of tea. "Tell us, Mr. Ransom, for the record, when did you last have a woman?"

"It's been weeks."

"How many weeks?"

"Several."

"Be more specific, please."

Ransom considered. "Five."

"Five weeks?"

"Approximately."

Another mark in the notebook, another sip of the tea. "Since then, have you masturbated?"

"Often."

"Do you think of her when you do?"

"On occasion."

A sip of the tea. "Did you love her?"

"I paid her."

"I see," said Macgregor. "How much?"

"Ten dollars and a box of chocolate covered cherries."

A mark in the notebook. "Was she worth it?"

"Yes," said Ransom. "You'd like her. Shall I give you her address?"

"That won't be necessary." A prim sip of tea. "She was your only encounter?"

"Except for myself."

"You," said Macgregor, "appear to have the frankness of a man without illusions."

"Most illusions are much too prickly."

"I find most of them quite nice."

"They make me itch." said Ransom. "I get red all over from scratching."

"And yet you still love your wife," said Macgregor.

"For always."

Macgregor finished the tea. He replaced the cup on the saucer. Ransom

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BREAKING IN

Barry Malzberg, a former editor of this magazine, has contributed to these pages from time to time, one of his short, marvelously compressed vignettes ("As Between Generations," "The New Rappacini," "A Soul Song to the Sad, Silly, Soaring Sixties"), each touched with a knowing bitterness and a sorrowing compassion for humanity. This story is no exception. . .

BARRY N. MALZBERG

I

ALIEN, ALL OF IT is so irretrievably alien to me yet to them the context of their lives is ordinary. This is the insight that has sunk over me recently; dodged in various alleys and corridors but finally not to be denied. They move through the routines of their culture, they breathe the gases of their planet, they enact the needs which their motility has given them . . . and regard themselves, most of them, as unspeakably banal. They do not know what they are. They do not understand that their existence can be understood by me only as a series of appalling and continuous shocks which, if this keeps on, will drive me quite mad, obliterate my consciousness, end the mission and any of the uses to which it might have been put.

They do not know this.

II

IN THE STREET I intercept one of them, a young female whose stress reaction brings a high tonic to her features. "Excuse me," I say, "do you know who I am? Do you know what I'm trying to do?" I reach toward her and her aspect congeals with terror; she backs up a step, then another step and then merges with another pack of aliens and is gone. I think for a moment of pursuit—I am seized by a proselytizing fervor; I will put my case before her—but as the pack of aliens stops in flight and then begins slowly and from a distance to advance upon me I decide not to do this. I decide to flee. I do flee through the pavements of their city which no matter how exposed they may be to the open air, always seem to be underground.

III

I DO NOT think that the mission is working out as was the original intention. Efforts at contact fail; my own perspective seems to be disassembling under the pressure of their irretrievable alienness. Nothing in the orders seems applicable to the situation; this is another definition of culture shock. Nevertheless I must persist; the responsibilities are large and devolve solely upon me.

I can no longer perceive the star which centers the system which is my home. Seasons alter; the constellations change. Now I am truly lost.

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"LOVE," I SAY, "you must truly learn to love," and reach forward to touch as not so long ago I reached to touch the female but these aliens do not flee; instead they circle me more tightly with sounds of cruelty and I found myself being restrained and then, finally, beaten. The blows fall upon me like caresses; I do not suffer in any terms which they would know but nevertheless they will not let me go. The restraints tighten, the circle darkens and after a time I am taken out of there once again.

V

IN THEIR INSTITUTION I answer all of their questions freely and in much detail. I know that I have nothing to conceal from them and in a way their knowledge of my mission may only hasten its implementation. I have failed in any other fashion to reach them; perhaps those in the institution will understand.

So I explain to them why I am here, where I have come from, what race of beings I represent, why we feel it necessary to become involved with their culture now and I talk and talk to them in their own language inexhaustibly until the sound of my voice fills not only their consciousness but my own, flooding and billowing through the vault of my consciousness, the rant and tone of my voice talking, uncontrollably talking and I feel that I am beginning to help them to see but just at the time where I think it is truly finished (or truly begun) they use their drugs upon me and unresisting I fall silent.

VI

THE DRUGS ARE STRANGE and miraculous; under their influence I see the aliens as, possibly, they want to be seen. Now without the protectorate of my own consciousness I see the aliens without a screen and for the first time they are not intolerable. Their motility no longer disgusts me; their features blend, their voices become harmonious and tinged with grace as they murmur and come closer to the place where I am resting.

"You must learn to love," I say giving my message once again but this time gently and with no suggestion of fear because the aliens have become my brothers, "you must learn to care for one another. You must learn to bind yourselves to the planet which is yours and to value in equal portion what has been given to all. You must end your madness. You must hold on to time," and so on and so forth but saying all of this as I look up at them I become aware of the fact that the mission is hopeless, I am hopeless, all is doomed for the aliens under the haze of their drugs are beautiful to me and I owe them no admonition at all . . . and surely, now that the circumstances have been given them, they will hold me under these drugs as long as necessary for me to see their world as they do.

VII

I DO AND I hate it. But now too I like it.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

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BEYOND THE RESURRECTION

GORDON EKLUND

(Second of Two Parts)

Illustrated by STEVE HARPER

His name was August and he appeared to be a thirteen-year-old child. But he had no past and his future was uncertain. How then, had he transformed seven people into something more than human—? And what would happen to them all now—

SYNOPSIS

FIRST DAY:

It is late in the evening at New Morning School — located on the northwest corner of an island in the Puget Sound — and it is raining. The children are asleep in their dormitory bunks. All, that is, but two: MELISSA BRACKETT *and a boy known only as* AUGUST. *They are out in the rain together, locked in total embrace under a rhododendron bush. He is thirteen, and she is a little older, and when they are found, it is discovered that their bodies are fused together, into one naked, gleaming, still-living creature.*

They are found by the two teachers on dormitory duty that night, GREGORY TALLSMAN *and* CORLIN MCGEE. *Tallsman is tall, twice-married, a teacher of film history and appreciation, and unhappy with the way his life has apparently dead-ended itself here at a school which once seemed the most exciting and desirable teaching position he could seek. Corlin is in her early twenties, attractive, the school's own finest graduate, an intensive therapist, and the heir-apparent of old* LARKIN, *whose school New Morning is.*

It is the year 2004, and the United States has been drawn into a long series of interminable wars, wars now fought by androids (on the front line) and social failures for whom no other alternatives exist. It is not a good time in which to live, but JOYCE LARKIN *has already lived a long time — he was born in 1922, the son of a famous movie star and her lover of the moment, identity forgotten. Joyce grew up under his famous mother's wing, but was able to educate himself well, avoid World War II, become a Hollywood columnist, and then, after his mother's death, go back to school for additional degrees and, eventually a doctorate. Ultimately, after a few years teaching at Yale, he started his own school — New Morning. Patterned along lines already pioneered by A.S. Neill, the school added to its core something*

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Larkin developed which he called Intensive Therapy – a way of dealing with childhood psychology which would, ideally, allow a child to grow into adulthood in perfect mental and emotional health. He wrote books about his theories and their practice and his school became famous. The children of the rich and the powerful spent nine years each in his school and many of them turned out very well indeed.

Until, that is, Larkin developed a cancer of the stomach – followed, later, by cancer of the lungs. He became a dead man – in all but fact – because the government offered him the treatments which would preserve his life at a very high price: his agreement to do no more innovating with his school, to train no successors, and to let the school gradually grow old to die when he finally died. By now the school has lost much of its momentum.

Larkin is called by Corlin McGee, and, with Tallsman's help, the strange body under the bush is taken to Larkin's quarters, where it is put in a spare bed.

The next morning MICHAEL ROGIRSEN *enters Larkin's house and discovers the fused Melissa/August body. Rogirsen is Larkin's failure – a fey boy's mind in a man's body. Intensive Therapy did not work for him, and Corlin's own kind of would-be therapy (for in those days she would willingly have slept with Larkin, her idol, and Rogirsen as his right-hand man was as close as she might come) only completed his mental disintegration. These days he lives in a kind of shack on the edge of the school property, near the woods. He comes and goes as he pleases, his mind better attuned to the wind and the earth and the trees*

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and the wildlife than to human ways.

He has come upon the Melissa/August thing just as its eyes were opening, and it speaks to him, identifying itself as August, who is his friend. But this cannot be August – and he flees in fear and confusion.

Later, a man named ANTONIO MILINQUA *comes to the school, where he confronts Larkin. Milinqua is the local area supervisor – the ready right arm of the government here. They know each other well, and usually there is no friction, for Milinqua likes Larkin. But today he is here on an official matter: the boy, August. And August – and Melissa – are no longer there. They have disappeared. Milinqua gives Larkin, whom he suspects of hiding August, until noon the next day to produce the boy. If he does not, his cancer treatments will be stopped.*

Tallsman and Larkin spend the afternoon searching the grounds and nearby woods for the two missing children, but it is not until dusk that they find Melissa. She is alone. She has changed.

She is transformed from an unexceptional girl of thirteen into a woman of, Larkin thinks, deep and exquisite beauty. Her eyes dance with grace, flow with wisdom. Her voice sings words as smooth as the waters of a still lake. Larkin finds himself enraptured by her – but when she offers herself to him, he dismisses the suggestion.

Mores have shifted, in subtle ways, by 2004. Take marriage: once regarded as the beginning and end of man-woman relationships, it is now an ideal, a goal most profess to seek but few bother to attain. It is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – and one finds it by diligent experimentation with those of the opposite sex. If there is someone "perfect" for your mate, how can you find her unless you search everywhere? Premarital sex is the rule, now – not the exception.

But the old problems haven't been solved; they only exist in new forms. Colin McGee lives with CLARK SHERIDAN, *the phys-ed teacher at New Morning, but sex has come to mean less and less to her as her experience with men has grown. Twice a month at least, Clark trades her with his friends for whomever they may offer, and she goes along with it, because it is, after all, the custom of the times. But she has never wanted but one man: Larkin, her idol, her ideal.*

The discovery of August/Melissa under the bush in the rain has triggered a series of crises for both Corlin and Tallsman. Each tries to continue with the routine of work at the school, but each is beset with doubts. For Corlin the questions now uppermost in her mind are those of her future, her relationship with Larkin (slipping), with his teachings (eroding) and herself – what is she and what does she want to be.

For Tallsman it is worse. His marriage (his second) is disintegrating. His wife sees little in the school and less in his attachment to the school. She is thought a prude, and the love which once existed between them is gone. When he is near Corlin, Tallsman finds himself desiring her, but is beset with self-doubts. He knows that in her eyes he is in no way especially attractive to her. And he resents Clark Sheridan with all the bitterness a seedy would-be intellectual can muster against an obvious stud.

But their mutual discovery that first

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night has brought Corlin and Tallsman closer than they've ever been before — disquietingly so for both of them, although for very different reasons.

SECOND DAY:

Tallsman rises early and covertly follows Corlin and Sheridan to the school. There, he approaches her and charges her with the fact that Milinqua must have been told about August and Melissa — and that only three people, she, himself and Larkin knew. He didn't tell anyone — has she? She denies it, but he presses the point: did she tell Sheridan?

After one of his classes, a girl named Mary tells Tallsman that some of the children, led by a boy named STEVEN, *having heard about the ultimatum Milinqua has issued have decided to take things into their own hands. They plan to kidnap Milinqua and hold him until he issues an official proclamation absolving the school and its students and faculty of all blame for all acts. Tallsman digests this information but decides to do nothing about it. Things will work themselves out, he decides. It is more important to find August.*

As he is leaving his office in the downtown Pelly Tower on his way to the school, Milinqua is kidnapped by the children. They have a gun. They force him into a car and drive off in the direction of the school. At first, Milinqua's attitude is one of amusement. Before reaching the school, the children turn off the road and stop. Milinqua is blindfolded and led on foot down an old dirt road nearly overgrown with weeds and grass. At the end of the road is an old abandoned one-room cabin. There is food there and other supplies. Four children, including Steven, remain with Milinqua. Steven has the gun. Milinqua tries to reason with him. When this doesn't work, he says he is leaving and steps toward the door. Casually, Steven shoots him in the foot. Milinqua will stay.

Chapter Seventeen
MICHAEL ROGIRSEN: THE WHOLE OF THE EARTH

THE RAIN HAD made it bad at first. Oh goddamn the rain, he had hated the rain then and the way it made him forget why he was out here, but then like the gleam of a cutting knife he had seen the creek and had gone for the creek, wading in deep to his knees, then falling, then crawling, and it had not been so bad right then, because he was wet all over now like a fish, and a fish, if a fish could survive on the land, it would never have hated the rain but gloried in it, and man had originally come from the depths of the ocean, crawling out one bright day to see the sun and demand the whole of the earth, its rocks and flowers and trees and bright light sky and big moon and tiny twinkling stars and the darkness of the night. Yet still he could not remember. Why was he here? Why in the rain? Why in the creek?

He was far from the school now. The forest drew tightly around him, seeming as if at any moment the violent green might fall, crashing against the creek, covering him, crushing him, smothering his life. A reason — a reason. Why was he here? And that was all.

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Oh.

The woman.

So now he remembered the woman, and with the rain rushing down his face wetter and quicker and colder than tears, he stopped, with his knees embedded in the floor of the creek and his hands raised high to the gray heavens above. It was she again, come calling to have him come running out to meet her in her resting place, where she lay waiting like a slick polished bear, like a wolf in her barren lair, and her odor reeking of the pit, waiting, this woman, but he had fooled her – oh listen – because the rain which he hated and despised and now it was the creek and the creek flowed far from the gates of her lair. He had escaped her calling, free Rogirsen man, and now his senses had fully returned and his mind was clear and sharp as a bell.

He was paused on his knees when the sound of the shot reached his ears.

Pausing further, waiting, he tried to know the shot for what it was.

It did not come again. He listened. He thought to investigate. He knew exactly where he was now. Rogirsen knew these woods better than anyone since old Jess. And that was it, he remembered. Old Jess. The shot had come from Jess's cabin. But Jess did not live there any more. Jess had gone; they had come and carried him away one winter night while Rogirsen watched. He remembered that too.

The woman. Scampering to his feet, water fleeing from him like a rabbit from a trap, he raced into the woods, for the woman had called and he had not come, so she had come for him, wanting to kill. Run, Rogirsen, flee like a bird without wings, your feet pounding like drumsticks against the deathly rot of this earth. Kick your heels on high, Rogirsen, for she follows with the wind, she is the wind, so run.

His heart was the sun at the center of his being while his lungs and mind revolved like planets around it. Rogirsen running, and he smelled, felt her pursuing breath, fell rolling, while she came on. And passed him.

Then came back. And the woods clung to him, and her, and she clung too, and his clothing shredded like autumn leaves, floating above, like dead bark on a tree, swept with the wind, and she had him where she wanted him. His eyes were dead, his hands hot as fire, and there was no way to stop her endless lunging.

But. And – but – nothing. Like nothing, like ever and before the commencement of time, nailing the man to the earth with the rain, plunging back toward the creek, throwing himself in and under, tasting blood with his slain hand.

Rogirsen waited until she had gone at last, then emerged from the creek.

August stood on the bank, saying, "Michael – I heard you."

This was the real August and, even in his shame at the act, Rogirsen was happy to see his friend. He slapped him on the arm and said, "You're wet. It's this rain. I'm wet too. Bad for all of us."

August took his head. "You too Michael. Here, come with me."

"Where?"

"We'll go to your cottage and get you some clothes."

"Oh good. Somebody stole my

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clothes. I was trying to catch him. Thief."

"I saw him," August said.

Rogirsen grinned and slapped his friend again. "Nobody has ever seen him before. I'm glad."

"Come with me."

"It was him and not her?" August asked, as they proceeded through the deepening rain, not hating it, August dressed for winter and Rogirsen bare as a shaven cat.

"She came for me too. I thought you saw. I got away from her. Twice."

"You don't let her hurt you."

"No, but she tries, she always tries, but I get it into my mind, and it never works, and that's even worse than if it did. You can't understand because you're young. Someday you will though, August, and let me tell you it's the worse thing. They get into you and what can you do except cut off your own hand? It's not your fault – it's them doing it – but I fooled them and jumped in the creek where they couldn't get me."

"I understand."

"We never talked about this before, did we?"

They were walking quickly now and Rogirsen felt good now, so he told August about the shot, how he'd first thought they were shooting at him. "But the shot came from old Jess's cabin, and Jess was a friend, so it must have been something else. You know what it must have been, August?"

"Nothing important," said August.

Rogirsen felt better now, because she was gone and because his friend was here. After that other time, he had not known if he would ever see his friend again. That had been awful for him, because when he had a friend Rogirsen felt as if he owned the whole of the earth. Not the tiny segment of grass and dust normally allotted a single man, but the vast entire whole of it, land and sea and cloud and wind.

August said, "If you want, I can give it to you, Michael. I can give it so that it will always be yours. They'll never be able to chase you again."

They had come to the cottage standing as lonely as an orphan in the rain. They passed inside.

"How?" Rogirsen asked.

Chapter Eighteen
Gregory Tallsman: Not Long for the Rain

They moved easily through the rain as though it were not a tangible reality but merely a natural metaphor for wetness, more like a coating of transparent film drawn across the slumbering earth, possessing the aura but not the substance of firm reality.

Tallsman ran ahead, drawing Corlin along behind, but not running so quickly as to cause her to hurry, ignoring the streaking of his face, the fierce vitality of the wind, the pain in his eyes which moved him toward tears and combined with the rain to cut the flesh of his face deep like a razor.

As he ran, Tallsman concentrated on the woman behind, seeking to derive some meaning from this miserable running. And Stephanie.

Hadn't he given her more than a chance? (He was rationalizing now.) What about last night? What had that been if not a final desperate plea for

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real understanding? Wasn't the substance of any marriage its natural and warm mutual sharing of the self? Hadn't Stephanie made this sharing impossible between them? And if so, didn't that make him free, his last loyalties discharged? Why could not and should not he continue to run across this land?

He felt certain he was a free man now. He had convinced himself of his own ability to seek his own will without regard for custom or tradition or what was right and what was wrong and who got hurt and who was forced to suffer.

"Quick," he said, opening the cottage door, leaping inside, and pulling Corlin after him.

She collapsed against him, out of the rain, her arms circling his back. She clutched the wet tatters of his shirt and her breath clung to his chest and her hair glided across his throat like moist leaves.

Carefully, Tallsman pushed her away.

"It looks empty," she said.

"Yes."

"Well, I was only guessing." She had recovered from the run, and now she went to look through the room. "It doesn't look like he's been here lately. I wonder where he could be in this rain. You don't see anything, do you, Greg?"

"No more than the usual mess."

"Oh, it's always a mess out here. Help me, please. Maybe they plan to come out here later."

He went to help her. Rogirsen's cottage always made him feel uncomfortable. It was such an impersonal place, despite its clutter, no warmer than a public washroom, all rotting wood and walls, no furniture except the bed, a scattering of things that were merely things: rocks and shells and dead flowers and bits of bark and blades of grass, all dead, and here a dead bird, rotted down to its bones and shiny beak, a rabbit's foot, genuine, some old clothes, wool shirts and patched overalls. Here was something. Here was a notebook. Flipping it open, Tallsman glanced through.

Nearly every page was covered with scrawls, but only an occasional word was decipherable. Tallsman read the words he could. On one page, written in huge letters, "WOMAN," and here on another page, "I . . . duck foot . . . so weekly wet." Or: "WOMAN" (again) and "augus di dnot," and there were many drawings too, but of a type that made Tallsman drop the notebook hastily to the floor without bringing its contents to Corlin's attention.

"Nothing," he said.

"Well, it was only a guess," she said. She had gone and sat on the edge of the bed. "I'm glad you told me but this was the only place on the grounds I could think of where they might have taken him."

"Mary said the woods," Tallsman said. "But I don't know where. Maybe it's all a joke."

"Oh no, I believe it. That's Steven. You forget how well I know these children. I know them better than anyone. I know them all, and I bet they've got him too. Children are master criminals because they're so much more devious than anyone anticipates."

"Steven especially."

"Yes, he'll make a great criminal," Corlin said.

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"You know, he used to come to my classes every time I showed a crime picture and he'd sit in the first row and I don't think his eyes ever left the screen till the end. I think he thinks he's Bogart or James Cagney returned to life."

"You ought to get to know his other identities. But I can't tell you. Have you ever heard him talk?"

"Yes," said Tallsman. He came over and sat beside her and felt instantly warm and good. Because of the scattered impersonality of the cottage, it had already become clearly associated with her in his mind. He felt this place was more her place than the apartment where she actually lived. That place was his place, Sheridan's place, but here she was she, and him too, and he knew he wanted her now, telling her how much he needed her right here and now but he paused, because he had remembered about her and Rogirsen a long time ago, and could it have been this very bed where they had coupled those faraway nights? He knew none of the details, but he drew away from her, repelled by a sudden vision of lean young legs wrapped around a sweating maddened waist. "WOMAN," he recalled. Of course. What other woman?

"Maybe we ought to go," Tallsman said.

"Really? But – " And she reached out to touch him.

"Can't we – ?"

She jumped. "Wait – look, Greg. Look at that." Getting to her feet, she crossed the cottage, and crouching down, then reaching down, she inspected the clothes piled on the floor, pawing carefully through the garments like a prospector searching for gold. She emerged with a shirt in her hands and she shook it at his face. "This isn't his – this belongs to August. I know – I saw it that time."

"Look deeper," Tallsman advised.

Her hands moved again and this time they remained within the pile. Examining the shirt she had given him, Tallsman found it soaked with the wetness of newly fallen rain. "And not so long ago," he said.

"And here are his pants," she said, drawing them out and feeling them with her fingers. "And wet too." She stood. "That means August was here today."

"But when?" said Tallsman, standing too.

She came flat against him. His hands dropped down, rubbed the flap that dropped her blouse floating to the floor. She said, "No," and released her skirt.

"All right," Tallsman said. He was not looking at her. He was watching as her clothes mingled with those on the floor. He had forgotten the bed now. He drew her silently down and situated her across the fallen garments. He entered her immediately, knowing it would not work till the next time and wanting this done and over.

When it was all done and all over, they emerged from the cottage. The rain had eased to a trickle which dripped gently from the clouds. They walked hand in hand toward the school, which rose before them as big as a castle. It was dark now, and the clouds held the sky. The stars were faraway and the moon had gone. Cor-

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lin rested her head against his shoulder. Tallsman slipped an arm around her back.

"Here comes somebody," Corlin said.

A figure was hurrying toward them, but Tallsman continued walking and refused to pause until the man reached them. He was a small man with a strangely hooked nose that dominated his face.

"Are you Gregory Tallsman?"

"Yes, I am."

"And who is this? You are . . . ?"

"Corlin McGee."

"Then both of you are under arrest. Would you mind coming with me, please? Right away. Let's hurry."

Corlin and Tallsman went away with the man.

Chapter Nineteen

CORLIN MCGEE: IF THOUGHT DREAMS COULD BE SEEN

HE HAD NOT been so bad the first time, she thought. Promising, one might say, but not that good either. And worse now, this third time, since he had become so insistently polite, more like a butler than a lover. But she had not really expected much more from him; she could not very well demand it now. This was Tallsman, and what was Tallsman, except the man she trusted, and so what else did she really want from him?

Lying below him, she listened to the rain above, coming hard against the flat bare roof of the cottage, then soft, then softer. The rain too was dying with the end of the day, and perhaps when they finally stepped outside, they would find the rain gone and the sky wiped clean and bright and looking new and shiny as an apple. But she did not think so. It was way past noon now, and if the men were not here already, they would soon be coming. With Milinqua, or without Milinqua? Now that was something she would be interested in seeing—eventually—but it did not seem to matter very much right this instant. How much better to wait patiently in the arms of this man, her trusting lover, pulsing when he pulsed, moaning every few seconds, twisting just so, and legs raised, lowered, around and around, all that was expected of her as a woman in terms of harmony and grace and rhythm. Oh but she was good at this, so wonderfully delightful, so practiced and experienced, and they might get tired of Larkin and then come looking for the two of them and come peeking here and see and roll him off and what a laugh. They would not say no, of course. Men like them had witnessed such flagrant immorality as to make an adulterer seem no worse than a juvenile bubblegum thief. So the man was bored with his wife (it could happen) and so the woman led him on (it happened all the time) and so they went to bed together (so what?) That wasn't any crime; it barely qualified as a minor tragedy.

Ah, but she was dead down below. Her thighs were a graveyard of deceased sensations. She had more feeling in the pits of her elbows than down below. Maybe let him have an elbow. What a rare and shocking treat for him. Oh, too slow, she realized; he had been up there too long. Her eyes were closed and pulsing patterns of blue and green

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thundered across the backs of her lids. It had gone on too long. She was almost beginning to sense a vague tingling down around the graveyard, and that would never do. Like a feather tickling her nose. And a gentle pressure. Her eyes were closed—let's see:

Clark?

Oh Clark dearest yes oh yes.

No, not Clark. She could not trust Clark and he was hardly an improvement over Tallsman. Rougher perhaps, minimally brutal, and sometimes with him she felt a sensation (like an extra big feather) down there.

But no, not Clark.

So who else? There wasn't anyone else.

That was her problem. This time was not her time and that was all there was to it. Why couldn't she have been born eighty years ago? Or eighty years from now? The customs of this time were not in tune with the spiritual needs of her soul, so here she was, not much past twenty, and all used up, dead down below in the one place where it was important to stay undead. What she needed was a man, one man, the right man, like in 1924, then she would be fine. The graveyard would bloom like a garden and the roses would flourish like wild grass and the rhododendrons would blossom and mingle with the swaying tulips. She had half thought Tallsman might be the one man she needed, but he was too old, too wasted, too self-involved. He had done his yak and then his wife, and there wasn't enough left for her. She liked him, of course, and she trusted him, but that wasn't nearly enough for a woman with her needs. She needed more, much more, and this was an important moment for him, and she was positive that by the end he would think it had gone well. And perhaps it had. She whispered something in his ear and snapped like a whip. And she? And Rogirsen?

Michael, she thought, but not passionately, for that had long ago been purged from her system. No. She thought of Rogirsen mingling and merging and absorbed by August, with his dark haunted eyes suddenly burning brightly with enlightenment, just like Melissa, and moving her head awkwardly against the floor, she wondered what it would be like.

Michael, when it's done and you're whole again, come and tell me and let me see that light burning in your eyes like a star gone haywire. Come and share that much with me.

As they walked across the grounds, the three of them approaching the school, Corlin turned to the man with the hooked nose and said, "You were looking for us earlier, I imagine, and you didn't know where to find us. See that cottage back there. That's where we were. Just us. Me and him. Nobody else."

"All right," said the man.

She smiled, knowing now that her original feelings had been right; the man did not care. "We were committing adultery," she said. "This man—he's married. He's also a teacher here at the school."

"Is that so?" the man said.

Tallsman grabbed at her arm, but she jerked away, and then they passed inside the school and it was dark here and she could not see the man's face.

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He took them to Larkin's office and held the door while they passed inside. He did not come after them. There were four people in the room: Larkin and Melissa and two men who looked as though they were in charge. Both of these men were standing. One was a black man with shoulders and chest as big as a boat and the other was a short white man with quick skipping eyes. Larkin was sitting behind his desk and Melissa occupied a chair at his side. Larkin's expression was dark and tragic. Melissa glowed like a burning fire.

The black man spoke. "Miss McGee?"

"Yes?"

"My name is Rutgers. I'm an assistant to the local area supervisor and this is Barney Ford, who is another assistant. We'd like to ask you some questions about this man August."

"Boy," said Larkin. "He's not yet thirteen."

"Yes, a boy," Rutgers said. "A child." He turned back to Corlin. "We've been looking for him now for several days and we haven't found a trace of him. Doctor Larkin has been helping us, but we understand that you have some information that may be of some assistance to us in our search."

"You're with the supervisor?" Corlin said. "Why isn't he here?"

"What?" said the man named Ford. He glared at her.

"Where's Milinqua?" Corlin said.

Larkin shook his head at her, but Rutgers merely grinned and shrugged. "Somebody has kidnapped Mr. Milinqua," he said calmly, as though this were a daily occurrence. "Some of your children, I understand. Do you know anything about it?"

"Of course not. I haven't left the grounds all day."

"We know," Rutgers said. "We checked."

"You're very competent," Corlin said. She turned and studied Melissa, who sat primly beside Larkin's desk, her hands clasped in her lap, her legs demurely crossed at the ankles. But her eyes were faraway. The same as they had been the night before. Corlin was beginning to wonder if Melissa would ever return to the earth again, or would she continue to wander forever among the distant stars? Was this the meaning of enlightenment? Would Rogirsen, returning, would he be like this too?

"Would you mind doing us a big favor?" Rutgers asked.

"Of course not," Corlin said.

"This girl here. We understand the boy attacked her and did something to make her like she is now. We've been trying to ask her some questions but it seems pretty hopeless. Doctor Larkin tried and he couldn't get anywhere either. We were wondering if—"

"I'll try," Corlin said. She went over to Melissa and stood in front of her. "Melissa? It's me—Corlin. Can you understand me?"

Melissa sat still. Briefly, her eyes seemed to flicker and move. But there was no understanding there.

"Melissa?" said Corlin again.

No response.

"This is useless," she told Rutgers. "We tried all last night, wanting to find August. She didn't say a word."

"She sang to me," Larkin said. "But that was earlier."

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"I heard her too," Tallsman said, from the back of the room.

"And who are you?" Rutgers asked, frowning. "What do you want here?"

"I'm under arrest. I'm Gregory Tallsman. I'm a teacher here."

"He was the one with me when I found the girl," Larkin said.

"Then maybe he knows something," said Barney Ford. "Do you know something?" he asked Tallsman.

"No," said Tallsman, shaking his head. He smiled lightly. "I wish I did, but Doctor Larkin knows everything I know and I'm sure he's told you."

"Do you have a wife?" Ford said.

"I do."

"And children?"

"Two."

"Would you like to see them in the army?"

Tallsman shook his head wordlessly.

"Then you'd better start telling us what you know."

"But I don't know anything."

"He won't talk," Ford told Rutgers.

"Oh," said Rutgers. "He won't, will he? Then you can go, Mr. Tallsman. Since you won't talk. But please don't stray. We may want you later."

"I won't," Tallsman said. His face was flushed red and he looked angry. But he went.

"I knew he didn't know anything," Ford said, after Tallsman had left. "But I felt I had to make sure."

"We've already provided Doctor Larkin the facts in this case. But perhaps you would like to hear them too." Rutgers was talking to Corlin. "This boy, August, have you ever wondered what he is, where he came from?"

"I have."

"And I can tell you. He's not from here. He's an enemy agent. Deliberately inserted here in your school in order to subvert this part of the world. In fact, he's really more than an agent; he's a weapon."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Corlin said.

Larkin answered: "They say August is a deliberate biological mutation, something cooked up in the enemy laboratories and placed here. They say he's like a time bomb and now he's exploded. They say he takes people like Melissa and makes zombies out of them. It's horrible, they say."

"But Melissa isn't a zombie," Corlin said.

"Then what is she?" Rutgers said.

"I don't know—but she's not that. She's thinking."

"That's what they want you to believe," Ford said. "I know how the yaks think. It's all subversion. All of it. If Milinqua were here, he could explain it."

Larkin nodded his head in careful agreement. Corlin looked at him and frowned. He had both hands clasped across his chest so firmly that she was afraid he would tear his shirt. What had these men done to him? Or was he only pretending?

"May I go now?" Corlin said.

"Not yet," said Rutgers. "You're still under arrest."

"But there's nothing more I can tell you."

"But there is. You haven't told us a thing about the kidnapping. We understand you are the one who masterminded the entire plot. We'd like to

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have Mr. Milinqua returned to us. We really would."

"This is ridiculous. I never heard of this until five minutes ago."

"Not according to Doctor Larkin. He says you were the one and we believe him."

"Joyce," said Corlin. "Why?"

"Trying to cooperate, Corlin. I suggest you do the same. These men won't harm you if you tell them the truth."

"Of course not," said Rutgers. "Now—shall we begin at the beginning?"

They began at the beginning. Corlin stood, listening, answering, watching the night moving past like a slow-motion film, each individual frame of action clearly defined and distinct. She answered all of their questions as well as she could but it was not enough. She knew nothing of the kidnapping, except what Tallsman had told her, but they would not believe her. Larkin sat like a gargoyle behind his desk, never speaking, seldom moving. After a few hours, two men entered the office and took Melissa away with them.

Corlin began to lose faith. Would this ever end? The same questions were asked again and again. Rutgers was polite and kindly, like a big brother; Ford hurled veiled threats behind every word he spoke. Then she saw a solution. It was coming toward her, streaking across the land. She could see it clearly now. It was a man tearing at the forest as he ran, ripping trees from the ground and snapping them like twigs in his bare hands. It was Rogirsen, coming to her rescue.

It was almost midnight when Rutgers said, "I think she may be telling us the truth."

And Rogirsen continued to run.

Chapter Twenty
Gregory Tallsman: The Growth of Poison

IT HAD STOPPED RAINING.

As he marched down the corridor, Tallsman had listened to the rain beating steadily against the roof. There was a man lounging easily outside the door of Larkin's office and the man had called, "Hey—don't try to go too far," but Tallsman had kept walking, listening to the familiar even pattern of the rain: *pitter-patter-slap-slap.*

Tallsman had listened to the rain, striding firmly and decisively like a man certain of his mission.

But when he reached the outside, he discovered that it had stopped raining.

Turning his eyes to the sky, Tallsman watched as the clouds opened as though parted by a sword and the moon whirled down from where it had rested to resume its proper place in the center of the sky. The stars unfurled around the moon like an escort of glittering guards, and Tallsman thought, *Poor Corlin—poor girl,* and walked into the darkness.

He was not angry now. The night was too precious to be marred by bitterness. There was a woman who was in love with him, a woman who held him in her arms and whispered against his lips, and he knew he had to feel fine, wonderful; he was far from being angry.

Inhaling, he tasted the night air. It seemed heavily laden with dark con-

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flicting emotions. Out there somewhere in the night was August, and with him now was Rogirsen, and somewhere else Milinqua sat surrounded by his keepers. Everything seemed so utterly chaotic, so thoroughly meaningless, that Tallsman nearly laughed aloud. Or cried. Or both. But nothing would help, and the air was clean and sweet and felt like a brand new morning pressing gently against the pores of his face.

Once he paused and turned to face the school building. He was surprised to see two lights burning. One came from Larkin's office, but the other emanated from far to one side of the building. Without thought or expectation, Tallsman turned and walked that way.

Still without expectation, he arrived and opened a door and squinted his eyes against the stark light. A smell reached him, an odor of stagnation and labor, hot days and long nights. He knew where he was. The school gymnasium.

And there was Sheridan down at the far end of the floor. Tallsman called out, "Hey! Sheridan! Hey!" and hurried toward he man.

Greeting him with a smile, Sheridan asked: "Have you seen Corlin?"

"She's with Larkin—in his office."

"That's good. I thought she was here. I'm leaving soon and I can take her home. I was fixing some of this equipment. I think I'm the only one here who can do it."

"She won't want to."

"Won't want to what?"

"Ride home with you. She's under arrest."

"Oh," said Sheridan. Shaking his head, he stepped close to Tallsman. "What happened?"

"August."

"What about him?"

"You know. They came here looking for him. They think she knows where he is. But she doesn't."

"What do they want with him? He's only a kid."

"Didn't Corlin tell you?"

Sheridan appeared to think, but he said, "Not that I can remember." Tallsman wished he had chosen another location for this confrontation besides the gymnasium. He did not like this place and he normally avoided it. These were Sheridan's home grounds. The gymnastic equipment—the ropes and bars and mats—the basketball court itself—the balls and rackets and other equipment strewn across the floor—the smell of perspiration—all of these things belonged to Sheridan. These were part of him. Tallsman was the odd man here.

"You told them about her," Tallsman said. "I know it was you."

"What do you mean?" Sheridan said.

"I mean you turned her in. I know it."

"But I didn't," Sheridan said. "I don't even know what you're talking about. I've never had anything to do with August. He doesn't like sports and I don't like him. He doesn't know how to enjoy himself. You know, I don't think I've ever seen him smile." As he spoke, he reached down and picked a stray basketball off the floor. He dribbled it skillfully, switching easily from hand to hand, and when he finished speaking he tossed the ball casually into the air. It rose a few feet, then

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came down and Sheridan caught it on the tip of one finger, where it continued to spin and spin.

Tallsman, watching the whirling ball, round and round, said, "Well, maybe I'm wrong."

"I think you are." Sheridan allowed the ball to hit the floor, bouncing once, t en rolling forlornly toward a distant corner. "You've got the wrong man."

"I better go," Tal sman said.

"Stay if you want. Play with my toys. I'm going soon myself."

"That's all right."

"And if you run into Corlin, tell her where I am. I wouldn't worry about her. Things will work out. I'm sure it's all a mistake. Anyone can make them, you know."

"Sure," said Tallsman.

He passed into the outer darkness, which gripped him briefly, held him momentarily, but then he pushed away, escaping its clutches, and moved forward. He told himself that it did not matter about Sheridan. Nothing mattered, he thought. It was better to swim with the current and forego all speculation.

He continued to walk, but without any clear destination in mind. He was walking and that was sufficient for the moment. The evening air wiped at his face, tickling his nostrils, freeing him from the taint of the gymnasium. He was back in his own world now and that was better. He passed the school, where a light still burned in Larkin's office, and moved onward, settling back, letting his feet carry him.

His feet carried him to Rogirsen's cottage, but that was all right. He approached and saw that a light was burning from within. Now how could that be? But he did not stop. His feet still ruled his body, and they made him move faster, quicker. Probably one of Milinqua's men, he decided. There were a lot of them around the school tonight. But that was all right too. He was not afraid of them. He had told them the truth.

Maybe it was Corlin. That was possible, he decided. They had released her and she had come straight to this place where she had known him best. But should he go to her now? Should he wait? Did she want to see him? Did he want to see her?

His feet reached the door and his hand went straight into the air and his knuckles rapped.

The door opened.

It was Rogirsen.

"You're here," Tallsman said. Then he stopped and studied the man but he could detect no obvious changes, so he slipped past him and entered the cottage. The door closed behind him and he whirled. Rogirsen faced him. But he saw nothing.

"Yes," said Rogirsen. His voice had not changed either. "You and she were here before," he said. No. His voice had changed. It was softer than before and there was a quality missing. A sense of hysterical intensity which had always lurked slightly beneath the surface of his voice, even when he was making the most commonplace statements. That was gone now.

"What do you know?" Tallsman asked.

"I saw you," Rogirsen said.

"How?"

Rogirsen shook his hands in front

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of him, then lowered his gaze and looked at his hands. "There isn't time to talk. You have to come with me." He spoke as calmly as a saint.

"Why?"

"There are people you must see."

"Who? Not August?"

"August is gone. You must come with me."

"I can't. I'm under arrest." He started to explain what had happened but Rogirsen's hands were trembling violently like two trees in a storm. Tallsman stopped and said, "All right—I'll go."

"The woods," Rogirsen said.

"Yes. All right. The woods."

Together, they left the cottage and Rogirsen led him down toward the creek and they followed its twisting path away from the school and into the darkness of the woods, where neither man spoke, watching the water instead, first as it sparkled with the light of the moon and then as it turned black, dark as a world of shadows, and still they followed the water.

Chapter Twenty-One
MICHAEL ROGIRSEN: ONE PLUS ONE AND ONE

ROGIRSEN AND TALLSMAN followed the path of the creek through the woods.

The creek was bubbling flowing near and the fish were crying (Rogirsen heard them) insistent and loud. For so many years he had listened to these fish, and now for the first time he was able to understand why they were crying, and it came as a shock, learning the fish were merely celebrating the coming of the rain, for the rain meant more water to them, new water come to join and mingle with the old.

Rogirsen walked, stumbling in the darkness, beside the flowing stream, ignoring the man who walked behind him, dominated by his own internal contradictions which left no time for those of another. Who was this other man, anyway? It wasn't August, the one who had pretended friendship and then refused to listen when he repeated, *I can't I can't it's wrong,* not even explaining why it was not wrong, merely forcing him (for his own good) with an incredible strength far greater than those others who had forced him to follow their whims in the past. But maybe this time was the one time when what they said was good for him turned out to be good for him. He did not know yet. But he wanted to know.

Reassure him, said the voice in his head.

Who? asked Rogirsen.

Tallsman. Tell him it's important and tell him he won't be harmed. He's afraid.

I'll tell Tallsman.

Yes, said the voice, *tell him now.*

Peering past his shoulder, squinting in the dark, Rogirsen glimpsed Tallsman's form struggling beside the black water. He said, "This is important."

"Who?" said Tallsman. "What's that? Oh. Well, it had better be important. But you say it's not August. I want to find August. You must know where he is."

"Nothing will harm you," Rogirsen said.

He thought: Perhaps all of this is part of some larger pattern, one I cannot yet understand fully. That could be. And Rogirsen could not help reviv-

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ing this thought as he walked beside the chattering fish, the bubbling swirling water. He thought that the water might be a part of this pattern. Perhaps the water was merely an invention of the man (Larkin) and the woman (Corlin). Perhaps there was no creek. And the voice in his head. That too was undoubtedly part of the pattern. An implanted device designed to observe and control his thoughts. And Tallsman behind him. That part was very good, but he understood now. Tallsman was—

Listen to the earth, the voice told him.

I won't.

Do it—listen.

I can't.

You can. Listen. Can't you hear the earth?

Rogirsen listened and he heard the earth. He heard it shaking and trembling beneath his feet. He knew that the earth was happy, and for a moment he regretted the necessity of so harshly treading upon its surface. But no, the voice told him that was wrong, for what reason could there be for the existence of this dirt and mud and rock except as a carpet for the feet of mankind? These thoughts were not his thoughts. He sensed this. He tried to drive them away. But he could not; they would not go. They stayed, dominating.

Tallsman said, "How far is this place? Wherever it is we're going. There's nothing here except trees and it's so dark I can't even see my hands."

"I—" said Rogirsen.

Tell him about the cabin.

"There's a cabin."

"Here?—where?"

"My friend lives there."

"What friend? August?"

Tell him to wait.

"Wait," Rogirsen said. "It's not far from here."

The two men continued their awkward stumbling journey through the darkness, and now as they passed, the trees seemed to lean downward, tilting, clutching, grasping. Rogirsen could remember when, walking here, he had seen these branches as grasping hands and the leaves as eager beckoning fingers. But he knew better now; he knew that this was not so. Trees were trees and branches were branches and leaves were leaves. The voice had told him this, and now he recognized the voice. It was his own.

And it was helping him.

For the first time he listened to the voice because he wanted to listen, and the voice told him many things he should have known. It told him that Larkin meant him no harm and the woman even less. Larkin had thought of him as an object, a convenient tool, and when the tool had broken, he had forgotten to take the time to fix it. But that was all.

The voice told him many other things, and it also told him he was coming near.

Rogirsen waved to Tallsman, then touched his arm. He pointed into the woods and the two men went this way. It was a short walk down a deep path. Soon, the cabin came into view and the moon appeared and the trees were gone. The cabin sparkled with light.

"What now?" Tallsman asked.

Go forward, the voice said.

Rogirsen ignored the voice. He al-

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ready knew. "Come on," he told Tallsman and they went ahead.

Chapter Twenty-Two
CHORUS: BIRTHDAY

LOOSELY JAMMED INSIDE the cracked neck of an old beer bottle (found outside the cabin near the bottom of an otherwise useless pile of rubbish), the small candle provided the interior of the cabin with a dim and flickering light. The corners of the room were dark, and the ceiling above was invisible behind a heavy black haze. Only the faces were clearly illuminated. The five poised faces which rested near the candle's flame. Five faces; five people.

One of the five was Antonio Milinqua. His foot hurt dreadfully and he had lost all conception of true time. He knew he had been waiting here in this cabin for a long time, and he knew that he did not greatly mind. This imprisonment was nothing more than a mild irritant, and it was that only because there was work at the office and, come morning, he would have to work especially hard at various routine administrative matters. It wasn't the difficulty of this work which irritated him, but the haste which the necessity of catching up would require. Milinqua despised hastiness in all its myriad forms; he was a naturally careful man.

The other four faces belonged to the children. Of them, only one (Steven) was especially noteworthy, and this was because he was holding a gun tightly in one hand. He was no longer worried that Milinqua might try to escape, because earlier in the evening he had confirmed to his satisfaction that Milinqua could no longer walk, but he happened to enjoy the feel of the gun. The other children were not important. Their presence here at this moment was purely happenstance. Any one of them could easily have been another and nothing would have changed. The children were people. They talked and acted the same as all people talk and act.

—The time? (Milinqua asked).

—I think it's around nine. Why? Are you ready to sign?

—You ought to know by now that that is impossible. Why do you keep asking me? Have you forgotten who I am? I am merely a pawn in this game. If I sign your statement, I will be relinquishing my right to remain on the board. I do not wish to do that.

—Would you rather die?

—I see no difference. I am truly very sorry. I wish you no harm. Doctor Larkin is my friend. But I cannot sign your statement. Instead, I worry about you.

—About me? Why?

—My foot. It is dangerous. Infection, gangrene, a disease. All are possibilities. If I were to die . . . well, I would not want to be in your position.

—Then sign the statement. Save my life that way.

They had eaten earlier, around dusk, splitting a can of cold beans five ways. The children were accustomed to finer meals, but the one day's change in diet was acceptable to them. Milinqua welcomed the beans. They reminded him of home when he was a boy. A can of cold beans had been a frequent meal then, and he and his family had lived

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in a one-room cabin very much like this one. Milinqua ate slowly, dreaming of the past.

—Steven, I'm cold (said one of the children).

—Then move over by the fire.

—That candle? You call that a fire?

—Then put on a sweater. Do something. Go home.

—Well, you said this was going to be fun.

—I'm having fun.

—But we're not. You got to shoot him in the foot. No wonder. We didn't even get to see it.

—I'll tell you what. If he hasn't signed by morning, I'll let you shoot him in the other foot. How's that sound? Now shut up and wait.

Of the four children, two were girls. Both girls were pretty, although one was much prettier than the other. It was this prettier girl who had complained of the boredom. The other, not so pretty now, was certain to be a beautiful woman in a few years. She had the round saucer eyes, the high tilting forehead, the misshapen bent mouth that beautiful women often have when they are children. Her name was Lorcas; the other girl's name was Lynda. Milinqua noted these various facts, because the noting of facts was an important element in his work, and Milinqua always performed his work very well.

—Why don't we try to get some sleep? Somebody'll have to watch, so I'll watch first.

—I'm too cold to sleep.

—Well, if he'd just sign—

—I cannot sign. I am really very sorry. I wish you could understand my point of view.

Outside:

Passing through a tiny hole in the wall of the cabin. Leaping past the clearing, dashing between the trees, fumbling through the deep forest. Here stood August, watching the cabin. He stood, listening to the voices. He heard everything and he saw everything. He was five hundred yards from the cabin. Between him and it stood a solid wall of giant trees, but he saw past them and over them as easily as if they had been made of polished glass.

He moved forward, approaching the cabin, not hurrying. He came close, glimpsing the dim light, but he did not hurry. He walked as calmly as an aged gentleman out for an afternoon stroll.

—There's someone coming.

—No. Who? Down the road?

—From the woods. I saw a shape. Moving.

—An animal?

—No. Not that big. Not here.

—Then who? I wonder who.

Before reaching the cabin, August paused and shouted his name. From within the cabin, the children answered him. He went ahead and passed through the door and made his way into the cabin, standing in the light. Steven came forward to greet him.

Trembling with fear, Milinqua looked at the boy. He heard the children expressing their joy and delight. Here was their hero, but here too was his fear. What was this? What had they set loose on an unknowing world? This was no boy. Milinqua shook like a small child trapped in a nightmare.

—They haven't convinced you, Mr.

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Milinqua (said August).

—No. Not at all. (Calm, stay calm, he thought.)

—But you appear to be trembling. Are you cold?

—A little.

—We'll get you a blanket.

—Thank you.

August turned toward the children and studied each in turn.

—You. What's your name?

—Lynda. Don't you remember me? You used to sleep next to me.

—I remember. And you. Your name.

He asked the others their names and they told him. The candle flared, faded, nearly perished. In the encroaching darkness, Milinqua trembled alone. And waited.

Chapter Twenty-Three
GREGORY TALLSMAN:
THE CORONATION OF A BISHOP

WHAT AMAZED HIM was the fact that he was not amazed. The sky lay distantly invisible above the shield of the trees. It was dark here beside the creek and Tallsman could see only a few vague shapes. The stream, wide and black, was flowing near. He heard the water moving but he could not see it. When he tried to walk cautiously, aware of the darkness around him, he would trip and stumble and nearly fall, but when he walked without thinking, as casual as a man out for a stroll on a bright day, then he had no trouble.

But he didn't know where he was going, and this bothered him. Rogirsen led and he followed. He could not see the other man but he could hear his footsteps treading evenly in front of him and he followed the sound.

"How far?" he asked, at one point.

"I don't know."

"But you know where we're going?"

"Nothing will harm you."

Rogirsen had changed but Tallsman did not feel safe with him. His transformation was not so apparent as Melissa's, but the changes had surely occurred. Rogirsen had found August and had been taken by August and here was the result. Following, Tallsman wondered: How many others? Where will it end? Or will it ever end? Or should it?

"I'd still like to know where we're going," Tallsman said. "And why. I'm not supposed to leave the school. I'm taking a big risk."

"Nothing will harm you."

"You've told me that a hundred times. Can't you say anything else?"

Rogirsen said nothing.

"Well, what about August? Where is he? You have to know."

Rogirsen said, "Wait – I think – "

Tallsman stopped and waited. He sensed Rogirsen standing a few yards in front of him.

Then Rogirsen said, "This way," and Tallsman felt him turn sharply toward the woods. Tallsman followed, passing between closely set trees, tall as giants but barely visible. After a moment, they emerged from beneath the thickest of the trees and saw the sky again. The light was better here and Tallsman glimpsed his own arms swinging at his sides. There was a trail of sorts here and they turned to follow it. The trail was badly overgrown with blackberry bushes and fallen branches, but it was passable.

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Soon, Tallsman felt their destination drawing near. He slowed his pace and stared ahead and then he saw it. The cabin sat in the center of a narrow clearing. There was a light burning inside the cabin and faint luminous rays slipped through the cracked walls in a dozen places.

"This is it," Rogirsen said.

"Yes. Well, now what? Do we go inside?"

"Yes – go," Rogirsen said.

Tallsman waited a moment, but Rogirsen did not move. Then, with a shrug, Tallsman stepped past the other man and went forward. He entered the cabin through the largest and widest hole. The interior was dim, almost dark, but after a moment he could clearly see. He saw a candle burning like the last burst of a dying sun, propped in the cracked stem of an old beer bottle. There was no other light. Leaves and branches covered the floor in a makeshift carpet. There was an overturned bed leaning against one wall, but no other furniture.

Tallsman stepped toward the bed and peered behind it. August was there.

He said, "August."

There was no reply. Tallsman reached down and gave the boy a shake. He seemed to be asleep and his flesh was cold to the touch. His breathing was loud and regular. Tallsman went back to the doorway.

He shouted: "Rogirsen! Come here!" and waited while a shape extracted itself from the surrounding shadows and came toward him.

"August is here," Tallsman said.

"Yes."

"But he's asleep. Or sick. I can't wake him."

"Yes."

"What should we do?"

"Take him away," Rogirsen said. "It's cold here."

Tallsman nodded and the two men went into the cabin. Rogirsen took the boy in his arms and carried him outside. He said, "We'll take him home with us."

Tallsman followed. The two men retraced their steps through the woods, down to the banks of the creek, then along the creek. The walk seemed shorter this time. When they reached the school, they moved away from the creek and headed toward the main building. They walked cautiously, Rogirsen still carrying the boy, and Tallsman constantly peered at the dark. August had not moved.

When they reached Tallsman's car at the back of the building, Rogirsen placed the boy in the rear.

"Are you coming along?" Tallsman asked.

Rogirsen said, "No. You'll have to do it alone. I – " Then, shaking his head, he went away.

Tallsman started the car and drove slowly away from the school, watching the dark. Inside the main building, a single window shivered with light. Larkin's office. Tallsman passed the light but nobody came to chase him. He moved the car a little faster.

The clock on the dashboard read eleven forty-five. Reaching the road, Tallsman made the car leap forward.

He drove for home.

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Chapter Twenty-Four
CHORUS: COMING NEAR TO THE END OF TIME

MIDNIGHT HAD COME again and gone and the island lay softly sleeping in its wake. Most of the people who lived here on the island were quiet people and had been well and fast asleep long before the coming of midnight, but here and there in isolated pockets, a few people, none like another, continued to move easily through the center of the night.

On the road between the school and the town, a car dashed through the mud and ruts. A man sat in the front seat of the car, holding the steering wheel tightly as if he were afraid that it might jump from his hands and assume a life and will of its own, but this was impossible, because the car was a bright new model and its directional equipment was firmly set and would never falter and the car possessed neither mind nor will of its own with which to assume a conscious existence. The man appeared to be unaware of these facts as his hands burned whitely straining against the wheel.

The man was thinking: Oh no, now what? What can I do running me into the army at my advanced age with death an almost positive certainty and him lying naked and safe in the back secure in the back safe as a baby? Took control of my will among the trees and stream and Rogirsen all the rest of them the cabin where I saw it but not knowing truly what I saw. Oh no. Tin can empty container which once contained cold beans and the edge bright like a star and not a dash or taste of rust or rot. Must have been they. If so, where and Milinqua why August? Poor Corlin ought to forget and go back to where I love her like she loves me. This running fleeing skipping away in the dark toward the army not my responsibility and I've got children Stephanie all waiting for some kind of fast excuse. I can't fight – not me – too old – no human beings on the front. Instead, machines with glazed mechanical eyes and swords for fingers knives for toes.

In the rear of the car, a shape (not man, not boy, not being – a shape) lay hidden beneath the guise of sleep, but his lungs labored terrifically like those of a long distance runner. Inside its mind, all was dark and empty like an underground cavern. No movement. Not even a meditative thought or nonthought. The shape and the car – equally dark – glided together through the night, each firmly encased by its own emptiness. At the wheel, the man cried deeply in thought.

Five minutes after twelve—and rolling.

Not far from the car's final destination stood the forty-one rising stories of the Pelly Tower. On the fourteenth floor in an isolated office, several men wandered aimlessly around a seated girl. The number of men in the office shifted constantly as one left carrying a thin strip of colored paper and another entered carrying a similar strip. The men avoided the girl as much as they could. They noticed that her eyes gleamed as brightly as day and this frightened them. Those men who were not afraid of her eyes were disgusted by her general condition, but this sense

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of disgust was actually a way of stifling their true fear, for these were men well accustomed to the necessity of hiding their real emotions.

Entering the office, a man passed a strip of colored paper to another man, who read the words printed upon it and nodded his head. This man thought: Making me sick poor girl destroyed by that thing wandering out there in the woods and they all know where but none will say. Milinqua half dead out there too by now probably having his mind eaten away like this poor girl and when he's dead everybody will finally rise a notch and won't it be awful because he wouldn't move up on his own. Still this girl makes me sick, looking at her.

The man dropped the paper on his desk and spoke aloud to the other men in the room. The girl was here in this room only temporarily and these men were glad of that. The thin strips of colored paper were messages from headquarters, the most recent of which had confirmed that the girl would be taken down the island first thing in the morning and left with the men at the big research installation. There she would be observed and studied and tabulated. The men here knew she was somehow connected with this installation but none knew exactly how or why. And none cared. This was something outside their immediate range of vision. They could not concern themselves with it.

And the girl? She was thinking too: Water running uphill trees bursting like dogs in the wind trickling leave and wandering men drying drying yes hello I've been waiting for you wetly to the inner ground's wet tube put this down oh cry and please don't please—

Ten minutes after twelve—and sighing.

Nearby, a modest house lay darkly slumbering in the night, but in the living room of this house a woman was sitting. Around her the room was dark, and her face was lined and drawn and creased like an old roadmap. Her fingers wiped fitfully at her eyes and her cheeks were smeared with the lingering traces of vanished tears. This woman lived in this very nice house with its lovely garden and two delightful children. Right now she was quite alone. The garden lay faraway outside and the children were sleeping. Her husband—he was gone.

Her thoughts came as tears, but these were new tears bearing no relation to the ones of despair which had flowed with the passing of the gray day. Her husband was gone, and now she was glad. She knew she had helped him to go, forced him to go, wanted him to go. She had wept before from the sorrow of separation, but now she knew how silly that had been. She was crying now, but for other and better reasons. Because she was happy. Because she was free. And because it was done.

A moment later, the woman got to her feet, wiping at her eyes. She thought she might like to smile, so she tried and the smile felt good, like a warm and happy mask. Keeping the smile, she left the room.

Fifteen minutes after twelve—and sleeping.

Near the school, the man stood encircled by the darkness of his home, peering deeply into the vague mists. This was such an ugly place, he saw,

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with clothes and garbage and rubbish tossed carelessly around the room. Had he really made his home here? And for so many years? For—wait—how many was it? He could not remember. Well, that part wasn't the important part. What difference were a few years?

Opening the door a crack, he peered outside. Now this was better. This was something clean and clear and correct. The voice was gone and he was alone. Now was his chance to use those senses which had gone untouched for so many years. It wasn't like before, when the voice had still been there. That had been like being a machine. He wasn't a machine now. He was a man, and it felt strange being a man this time; mostly it felt new and strange and different. He did not think he had ever been a man before. He could not recall it.

Looking at the night sky, he thought about his friends. He could remember his friends, but there had only been two. Tallsman and August, but soon he'd have more. He thought about Larkin, the man who had ridden his dreams like a demon. Poor Larkin, he thought. Then he thought about the woman—remembering her name—Corlin—and he felt sorry for her too. Poor Corlin, he thought. She was a lot like him, trapped by something beyond her control. He was free now. He sympathized with her. He wished her well.

Beyond the cottage, the night was a crystalline sculpture resting precariously atop the spinning planet. It felt good feeling sorry for someone else. So many years he had lived and during all that time he had never once felt sorry for someone besides himself. Now, transformed, reborn, whatever, he had found a whole new world, one so vast and wide and deep that it would take him a lifetime to determine its true size and shape. But he had lost something as well. He had lost the past. Those years were gone and only tiny bits and shreds remained, seconds and minutes rather than years. But what did he want with a past? What use could he make of those years? They were gone and done and wasted. He felt sorry for the rest of the human race, for all those billions of men and women destined to live their entire lives burdened by a constantly expanding past. The poor bastards, thought Michael Rogirsen.

Twenty minutes after twelve—and seeing.

In the north wing of the student dormitory of New Morning School, the children roamed sleeplessly through the darkened chamber. The two teachers watching tonight were the children's special favorites, since the two had far more in common with each other than with any of the children. So because of this, once the lights were out, neither teacher bothered to glance inside. Staying in their seats, they did whatever it was they liked to do together and left the children free to run and whisper and talk and cry.

Now, a few of them were asleep. A full hour had passed since the darkening of the lights, so a few were already talked out. But most of them were not. Many had hardly begun to talk, and these were the ones who skipped through the dark, darting from bunk to bunk, chattering like a flock of excited sparrows.

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—They'll never catch him way down there in the woods. I don't think anybody even remembers that old cabin except Steven. He remembers everything. I'm sure they'll never find him till he's ready to be found.

—Shot him in the foot? Oh no, not really? Just like that? *Bang.* In the foot?

—We'd gone to town to deliver the message, see, and when we got back, there he was, all squatted down on the floor with his shoe off and a stream of blood thick as a river pouring out of his sock. I got sick. I thought Steven had blown his whole foot to hell, but he said no, it was only a scratch.

—He'll have to sign pretty soon and then it'll be over. I bet you he's done it by now or else Steven has blown his other foot off. In a way, you know, when it's over, I'll be sorry. It's really been fun.

Only two of the children in the room has actually participated in the day's events, but to hear them talk a person would think that each one of them had witnessed every single moment. Each seemed to know everything and wanted to tell it again and again to another, and this other also said he knew it all.

But there were a few who neither knew nor cared. A few who were left cold by the subject. These children also talked.

—Mother's coming up here to inspect the school.

—Oh no.

—Well, it's my fault, because I wrote her and said Larkin made us eat bugs for supper. She believed that, so I told her he was an old pervert who chased little girls. The younger, I said, the better. She believed that too.

—No.

—And I thought it was funny and would teach him a lesson. I showed him the letters but he just shrugged, so I went ahead and sent them. I was really mad at him. I had gone to see him and asked him why boys were shaped like they are and he told me it was because it made their pants fit.

—But you know why. You're eleven years old.

—Sure, but he still shouldn't have told me that crap. This'll teach him. Next time I bet he watches his mouth.

And there were others still who had reverted to a deeper, more meaningful world. For these children, a man's broken foot, a river of freshly flowing blood, an unsigned document, none of these things were more than mere insignificant trivia. These children were fully aware of the total nuances of real life. These children existed in the buried world of true dreams.

—I know I love him. What else can I say?

—But you can't love him. He's so old, almost seventeen if—

—But I do love him. That's the whole thing. When he touches me, looks at me, when he smiles, it's like—you wouldn't know—like falling off the highest mountain in the world and floating, flying, never reaching the ground. That's what he's like to me.

—But he doesn't love you. He can't.

—He does. I know he does. You wouldn't know.

—I know it's not love.

—And how would you know? Tell me that. Who would ever think of falling in love with you. You don't know the first thing about love, and

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that's the truth. Nobody would ever want somebody like you, so leave me alone. Please. Just leave me alone.

Twenty-five minutes after twelve—and passing.

The sparkling light in the ceiling painted the office with a yellow shimmering frost. The two men circled the woman like hunters stalking a deer. One hurled questions like bombs while the other, leaning back, spoke as softly as a contented cat. The old man, sitting behind the desk, clutched his heart as if it were a living and separate creature that demanded partial and individual love and care.

—You've got a family and you won't talk. I don't understand you. All I can think is that you don't give a damn for anybody but yourself—and this freak out there in the woods.

—But I don't know anything. How many times do I have to tell you? Why can't you believe me?

—Miss McGee. Please. I'm very sorry about this, but you must try to understand our position. We are aware of no logical reason for Doctor Larkin to be telling lies about you. Because of this, we have to assume that he's telling the truth. Now why don't you do the same? We aren't asking that you produce Mr. Milinqua. We merely ask that you divulge all the information that you have in your possession. Simply that.

—But I don't have any information.

—You want to find yourself on the front in a uniform? How about your father? He can't be a young man. Or your mother? How old is she? This isn't a joke. I think you ought to start talking. For their sake, for your own sake, for everyone's sake.

It was twelve-thirty when the office door opened from the outside.

Ford and Rutgers turned at the sound. Corlin heard too, but she was too tired to move. She sat with her face buried in her hands.

—Mr. Milinqua!

—Yes, but what is happening here?

—Weren't you—?

—Yes? What?

—Weren't you kidnapped?

—What are you doing to this young lady?

—Questioning her, trying to find out—

—She knows nothing. Hasn't she told you?

—But he told us—

—I'm sure you misunderstood what he told you. Now I think both of you ought to go home. It's very late. Undoubtedly you are tired. Get a good night's sleep. I'll handle the investigation from this point.

—But how did you get loose?

—It wasn't difficult. They were children. Now—please—you must go.

—There's something wrong with your foot. Did—?

—It's nothing. I tripped in the woods. Now, please . . .

The two men went. Turning to Corlin, Milinqua smiled softly at her, and she smiled briefly back, then turned her eyes.

Milinqua spoke to Larkin:

—I'm tired too, Joyce. It has been a long day for all of us. I'll talk to you in the morning. Until then, good night.

Then he was gone too. As quickly

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as that. And Larkin and Corlin were left alone.

She looked at the door with an expression of dismay and relief. Shaking his head, Larkin removed his hand from his heart.

Corlin said:

—Why Joyce? Why?

It was thirty-five minutes after twelve. And done.

Chapter Twenty-Five

JOYCE LARKIN: THE LONG WAY OUT

CORLIN ASKED SIMPLY: "Why, Joyce? Why?"

She was standing across the desk from him, her arms dangling uselessly at her sides. He returned her stare and suddenly the office was too confining. The walls rushed straight at him like trains speeding toward a crossroads. He closed his eyes, the walls receded and he rubbed his hands hopelessly across his chest.

"You won't tell me?"

"Is it necessary?" he asked. "Can't you see?"

"You're weak," she said.

"I'm broken."

"Why won't you tell me?"

"I'll tell you—but wait—give me time."

She nodded in agreement, her head jerking slowly as if the confirmation of a visible fact were in itself a painful experience. Larkin looked away from her. Then he sat, "Sit down, Corlin."

She sat down.

He said, "Think of me as a dead man. It's the easiest way. I am a dead man, don't you know? Dying separately in two distinct locations." He rapped his chest and patted his stomach. "Cancer down there eating at me right now as we sit here—and it's nothing new. It's been eating at me for ten years now. How old are you, Corlin? I've forgotten."

"Twenty-three," she said.

"I see," he said, forgetting the number immediately. What was a year but a series of days stacked one atop the other like slices of cut bread? Not many years; she was young. He kept that fact in mind while formulating his reply. He remembered that he too had once been young. And not so many years ago—less than seventy. He recalled those years in terms of shadowy fragments: fraternity parties packed with games and laughter; puttering automobiles that had to be shifted by hand; movie premieres where even the spotlights seemed to shriek with glory; dinner parties that danced long past the first light of dawn. The people of his youth existed as dark figures mystically moving through these misty pageants. They were hardly real. Even his mother—even she was recalled merely as the leading player in an enormous, half-forgotten melodrama. But sometimes she had talked to him and he remembered that part clearly too.

"At the universities," he said. "Do you know if they still have fraternities?"

"How should I know? Joyce, please . . ."

She was impatient. But she was young. Looking at his hands, she glared at them as they rolled across his middle like lovers clinging to a rocking bed. He did not look at her this time.

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"I'm sorry," he said. And he told her the details of his sickness.

"Then you're the one who told Milinqua." She laughed at him. Sorrow and pity dominated her laughter. But for him? he wondered. Or for herself. She said, "That's funny, because Tallsman thought it was Sheridan. He decided it had to be him because it couldn't be any of us, so he came and told me about it. I thought—I knew it had to be you. I knew it wasn't me and Clark's too stupid, and Tallsman too. Now at least I know why—that was the part I couldn't figure out—but now I don't know what changed your mind. Do you want to die now?"

"I don't know," he said. "But I didn't change my mind. Or did I? Milinqua and I are old friends. We understand each other. He is a very good man, a kind man. You wouldn't understand. You're too young, but when I was a boy, we called them gentlemen, and we pronounced the word as if it were two words. Milinqua allows me the pleasure of doing things my own way. We spar like a couple of boxers—and then Steven came in and stayed—and how was I to know August would stand up and walk away? Eventually, in my own good time, I would have told him, and he knew that. I gave him some hints and he understood but August had already left. When he found him, he would have thanked me. He would have taken him away, and in return I would have received another year or two or life."

Corlin was laughing again, but the pity and the sorrow had gone from her voice. He asked her to stop, but she would not.

"When you were searching for him," she said, words darting cleanly between her laughter. "Then you wanted to find him but you wanted to hand him over to Milinqua. Like Melissa."

"No," he said, waiting for her laughter to end, thinking as he waited how he had come to change his mind. How he had seen Melissa in the woods and fallen in love (not love—more than love—he had been in love many times and it wasn't like this), seeing the end result of all his years of striving, gazing upon Melissa and seeing it and hearing her sing, knowing this was what he had been trying to do ever since the day he had opened the school. Now, looking at Corlin, shivering as her laughter ended, he recalled that she was the most successful of all his children, that he had once felt that she was as near as he could come to producing that mythical creature, the healthy and whole human being. But take her and compare her with Melissa and see the difference—thinking this, he almost laughed aloud, but before he could begin, she had stopped. So he told her how he had come to change his mind.

"I cling to what's left of my life like a shipwrecked sailor hanging onto a shred of flotsam, knowing there's nothing near me but the sun alone in the sky and an unbroken sea of foaming water, but continuing to live in the hope that tomorrow will bring with it an excuse, a reason for living. And it has happened to me. I have my reason now. I have seen it."

"Rogirsen too," she said.

"There will be others."

"Yes," she said. "But why didn't you tell those men? Why did you tell them

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I knew about the kidnapping? You knew I didn't."

He smiled and told her. He had known he was a weak man. Those two men had frightened him. The older a man, the weaker he was. That didn't seem fair, but at least he knew how to control his weaknesses. Corlin was young and strong and she had withstood their questioning in a fashion he never could have managed. And too, he had guessed that Milinqua would soon be coming. Milinqua was another man not apt to be hampered by his own weak points.

She said she understood.

"How late is it?" he asked.

"I think it must be close to two o'clock."

"Then will you help me?" Standing, he discovered that his knees were weak. He tried to cross the room and she caught his elbow and guided him to the door. "I'm tired," he told her, "That's all."

She said she understood and they went outside.

Beneath them, the creek flowed darkly, running through the night. They stood on the rickety wooden bridge, which Larkin himself had constructed years ago, and looked down at the water below. Larkin held himself braced against the railing, and the tired wood rustled in the wind. Laying a hand on top of his, Corlin pressed down.

"It's a dark night tonight," he said. "I had almost forgotten that it was here. We've been inside a long time." He had regained a measure of his strength and had walked this far without help. But now he wanted to pause and rest before completing the journey. He looked down at the water and it made him dizzy, the narrow black knife of the stream cutting deeply through the night. Out there beyond, August was waiting. And Rogirsen now—she had told him about Rogirsen. He was glad about that. Another man had been set free.

Corlin said, "When I was a girl, I was in love with you. Have I ever told you that?"

He said, "No," trying to keep his voice free of irritation. But he did not feel like talking now. Or listening. What he wanted to do was watch the water flowing below and think quiet thoughts to himself, gliding darkly along within the river of his own mind. But Corlin's voice was insistent; she said no. And at last he relented and removed himself from the multiple complexities of thought. He listened to her.

She said, "I thought you were the greatest of them all. I had read the others—starting when I was twelve with Freud—and I knew what they had done, all of them, and how important it had been, but as far as I was concerned you were the one who had taken all their jumbled theories and contradictory thoughts and made them into a practical workable whole, and I knew I was the end result of all that work, the final recipient of your knowledge and wisdom, and I guess that's why it was hard for me to avoid falling in love with you." Her hand pressed tightly against his, as snug as two interlocking pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. "And my love for you was even greater than that, I think, because I was sure all along that

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there had to be more. I knew what I was, you see, and I couldn't believe that was all. I was sure you had even more things to give me but I knew you wouldn't give them unless I proved to you that I was truly deserving of them. So that's why I tried so hard. That's why I learned how to conduct the therapy sessions and took over your work and left you free to do whatever you wanted to do. I can remember that I felt the same way about my father, wanting to do everything that he ever did. But I didn't want it to be like that with you. I knew that wouldn't be right, so I kept trying harder and harder till finally I got too tired to try any more and I gave up. That's when I stopped. I couldn't go any further."

Larkin said he thought he understood. He had listened to her and he knew she had been speaking honestly. But he really understood her no more than he understood the water that ran below, blacker than the night which circled it. Or the stars winking blinking above, hidden by distant looming clouds, and there was the moon way up on high, and the wind whistling, brushing his hands and face. Larkin chewed his lip. It was cold. He shivered.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking up at her. She had not finished yet; she was still talking, but he sensed that she was approaching the end.

She said, "So I brought him here and we looked at your bed and I thought to draw him down like we had intended. But I didn't. I couldn't. The other time, the first time, in the cottage, it had been all right that time, but looking at your bed, wanting to come even closer to you, I knew it wouldn't be right, I couldn't do it, so I took him away and we found this room here and this same bed. It was awful. You know that. Long before the end, he went mad, screaming and shouting, lashing at my skin and my eyes. He had been as near to you as I could ever come without actually having you. But he was too faraway. Then he was gone. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do," Larkin said. "But Corlin—think—I'm too old now." Her hips stood evenly on a level with his eyes. Her hands nervously toyed with the flaps of her blouse and skirt. Beyond, the night crept fearlessly through an unshaded window and doused the room faintly with darkness.

He had tried to explain, but she shook her head. "But no please just say you will yes please."

"Don't beg me," he said.

"Say yes."

"All right," he said. "All right—yes," and he held out his arms. He could not have said anything else, old as he was, too old for saying no. She came hurriedly against him, afraid to wait, and he thought he might be able to do it properly if he could only find the right way through the familiar patterns of the past. He tried that way, going back, drawing the past close around him. Mother saying you're better than any and she warning him about the girl from whose father was and not the first time owner of a chain of discount stores from coast to coast.

"Corlin," he said softly, dropping the past, forgetting the past. He removed her blouse and let it slip to the floor.

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The past would not help him. He laid a tentative hand on her breast. The smooth flesh of her youth was a tiny hill beneath the hard grim flesh of his palm. He tried to forget about that too. He pressed harder and rubbed the whirling ridges of her nipple. He dipped toward the abrupt warmth of her middle. He was trying. Lowering herself, she rolled between him. They kissed.

"Joyce," she said.

And that was the last either of them said.

He performed like a gentleman, moving easily and slowly, as tender as a father, coming close and not surprised when he discovered that he was ready. That meant nothing. That meant the past was gone, but he had already known that. She was his now, and he held her gingerly as if she were a child. He was not shamed by the nearness of death. He listened to her, knew her reality, if not for him, then for whomever she thought he was.

And he pressed his lips deep into the flesh of her shoulder.

When it came, it came slowly. It acted as if it had never expected to be called again, as if it had slept and were now slowly waking, but coming, for him and her, coming for both.

Afterward, he held her tightly in his arms, for he had learned half a century ago that this was the essential moment for a woman. To her, lying here, sex had merely been a prelude to love. He nestled close to her. The darkness came down and covered them both like a shroud. He sighed and let it surround them.

Later, she said, "I thought I was in love with Tallsman. Can you imagine that? But it was only because of you and—I trusted him! And I still do. But now I have you to trust."

"Don't."

"Why not?"

"Just don't," he said. "I'm going to die soon."

"Oh, don't talk about that now," she said. "I don't want to talk about anything right now. All my life it's been talk and talk. I want to stop for a minute. Do you understand?"

"I think I do," he said.

When she was ready to leave, he asked her to switch on the light and do him a favor and stand naked and turn on her heels so that he could see all of her. She was happy to do as he asked, smiling as she did it, and he watched her turn, slowly once, then twice. He closed his eyes and told her it was all right to go.

When she had gone, behind closed eyelids, he watched as she continued to turn, whirling around and around, again and again. He knew he could die willingly now. He had an image fine enough to carry with him to the grave. Waiting, he called upon death and asked it to come. His eyes remained tightly sealed.

But death did not come. Sleep came. Waiting beyond the window, death may have watched him. But it did not come. If anything, death had been amused by him. Death was never that easy.

Chapter Twenty-Six
CORLIN MCGEE: AUTOMATIC RUNDOWN

CORLIN FASTENED the totality of her attentions onto the road, her hands

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gripping the dashboard controls that served to disconnect the automatic system of the car and allow the driver to guide the vehicle manually around and beyond unforeseen obstacles. She knew this was hardly necessary right now in spite of the poor condition of the road caused by yesterday's continual rain and normally she would have curled up in the back and rested until the car delivered her home, but she felt she had to do something now. She couldn't rest. She was tensed up tighter than a drum, zooming higher than a kite, and there was no other available outlet where she could rid herself of this excess energy, nothing but the winding road ahead of her, no place left to run, so what else was she supposed to do now? That was the part they had never explained to her. Where was she supposed to go now that it was done? Home? With Sheridan? To sleep? It was already close to morning, and each passing minute seemed to make her more fully awake than the last. How could she ever get to sleep? She was beginning to think she would never be able to sleep another wink—she was almost sure of that. Oops—a mudhole. She guided the car neatly around it and felt as proud as a child completing his first successful bicycle ride.

Poor Corlin McGee, thought Corlin McGee. What can she do with this crazy furious churning mixed-up life they've given her? And now Larkin. And of course, that had not been nearly the way she had expected. But what ever was? Not that Joyce hadn't been a tender lover—he was that and a gentleman too—but now that it was over and done, what was she supposed to do? Was it always going to be this way, her whole life, achieving what she had always desired and then discovering that it wasn't what she had really wanted after all? Well then, what was it she wanted now? Wasn't that the whole problem? Because she did not know. There didn't seem to be anything left. For the first time, she moved through life toward a blank future. There was nothing which said, *This is what you're going to do next, Corlin.* Her last goal had been achieved; Joyce was her lover. But now, so what? So it had been a comforting hour or so, good but not great, and although he had tried to understand, it had not worked, not completely, so now what?

Her headlights caught them neatly, drawing the four figures out of the shadows and placing them evenly in the forefront of her vision. As soon as she saw what they were, she stopped the car. They were standing near the edge of the road at the end of a long curve where any passing motorist would be sure to see them. She hadn't recognized them—but they were children—and they were here. That had to mean something. She heard them coming toward the car as she sat in the dark. Their feet pattered and squished through the wet and mud. She waited.

A finger tapped her window. Sliding across the seat, she tapped a lever which unleashed a circle of light that surrounded the car. Then she lowered the window. Only one child had come, and he was leaning against the car. He smiled at her. She thought she saw the other three waiting beyond the edge of the light.

"Hello, Steven," she said, calmly.

"Aren't you surprised to see me?"

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"I don't think anything could surprise me now. What are you doing out here?"

"Waiting for you," he said.

"I should have known. Who's with you?"

"Just some of the kids. I've got a message for you. From August."

That didn't surprise her either. "Is that why you let Milinqua go?" she asked.

"That's right."

"Where is he? August?"

"He went home with Tallsman. That's the message. He wants to see you."

"In Tallsman's house?"

Steven thought that was funny. "No," he said. "In the backyard. There's a house there built in a tree. That's where they're hiding. He's got something he wants you to do for him."

"And you don't know what?" she said.

"Not me. He wants you right away."

"I'll go now," she said. She was staring at the boy. What she saw surprised her. He had been changed, all right; that much she could plainly see. But the changes were not nearly so obvious as Melissa's. Steven seemed to stand taller in his shoes. His eyes were clear and his face was confident. Small changes such as these—but many of them.

"Are you all right?" she asked him.

"Sure. Why shouldn't I be?"

"No reason," she said. And that was right: there was really no reason to expect enlightenment to affect anyone the same way.

"I've got to go now," he said. "I'll see you later." He stepped away from the car, waving at her. He was gone into the darkness. She heard the other moving away with him.

And now four, she thought, remembering Melissa and Rogirsen. That meant there were six of them now. The car was moving, she suddenly realized, and she couldn't remember starting it. She didn't care. She set the directional equipment to take her home, then turned off the interior light and leaned back and rested, not sleeping, her eyes kept open. At least she had somewhere to go now, she told herself; at least that was a beginning.

Obediently, the car halted in front of her home. She decided that she needed a few moments of additional rest, so she sat quietly in the car and stared at the apartment building in front of her. It stretched eight stories into the sky, a wide dark concrete box. There were a hundred and ten units in the complex, she remembered. Of these, fifty-five were one-room studios (most equipped with a kitchen the approximate size and shape of a large cupboard); the remaining fifty-five apartments were one-bedroom units such as the one she and Sheridan occupied. How many people actually lived in this building? she wondered. Two hundred—oh, more than that, she was sure—three hundred at least, or three hundred and fifty. And why? The island was rich with vacant land. There was more than enough room so that everyone could have his own home with an acre of bare land separating him from his nearest neighbor. So why did everyone want to live in a place like this? Or the other one two blocks down the street, or the one after that,

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all of them just the same, equally as big and impersonal, just as dark. It sometimes seemed to her as if the whole human race were trying with all its enormous might to squeeze itself into a single vast room. And what would things be like in a hundred years? She took a glance ahead at the year 2104 and discovered eight billion human beings living in a single enormous building while the remainder of the living earth, green and blue and golden, ran wildly free around it.

She drew her thoughts back from the future and turned the car, letting it glide through the night. It ran down streets, shifting and turning and rumbling, and she watched the passing buildings and it seemed as if each ran flowing into the next, ignoring space and time, running like quick white water. At last there was only one building and she realized it was Tallsman's house. She had arrived.

Getting out of the car, she approached the house, but she did not try to go inside. Instead, she went around to the backyard, where the grass was shining with yellow light as dawn peeped above the horizon. She saw a tree, a big towering weather-beaten madrona, near the center of the yard and went toward it. She wasn't surprised to discover a homemade rope ladder hanging from a low branch. She climbed the ladder easily and, reaching the top, pulled herself inside the treehouse. It was badly constructed and unpainted and looked as though a moderate wind would send it spinning toward the ground. Some boards overlapped others and there were huge holes and gaps in the walls and ceiling. It was dark inside the treehouse but she could see.

She said, "August," speaking softly, almost whispering.

He did not reply, but she knew he was there and she sensed that he was awake.

Moving silently, she crawled around Tallsman's slumbering form, glancing briefly at the man she had once loved, and went to August's side. The boy was awake. His eyes were open but his face was cold and expressionless. This was the first time she had seen him since that first night and she was surprised that he looked the same as he always had.

She whispered his name again.

There was a voice in her mind: *So you've come.*

"Yes," she whispered. His voice did not frighten her. "I met Steven on the road."

We'll wait here till morning. You'll need to rest.

"I'm not tired. Is there—?"

Yes. But it's too soon now. Why not rest for a few hours?

"What is it you want me to do?"

Later, said the voice.

"You don't want to tell me?"

The voice did not answer her this time. She looked at August and squinted and saw that his eyes were staring coldly at her. But he was smiling. In his smile, she saw a way out of this, these endless complications one piled on top of another until it was impossible to see the light, and the buildings that ran and flowed, and all these people she could never understand—people like Tallsman and Sheridan and Larkin—how was she

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supposed to know which one she really wanted?

She asked August to help her.

Not now. Now I need your help. Perhaps later.

She wanted to argue with him. But she guessed that it was useless. Turning over, she lay flat on the floor and stared at the roof. She was tired but she did not want to sleep. She waited for the end of dawn, but it was slow in coming.

Chapter Twenty-Seven
GREGORY TALLSMAN: MORNING DEW

TALLSMAN WAS AWAKE now. He wanted to open his eyes and smile and greet yet another day, but he couldn't. Before he could open his eyes, he had to regain control of his body. Who controlled it now? He wasn't sure of that, but he knew it was someone besides himself. Sometime during the night, he had been forced to relinquish control of his own body, and something else had moved in and taken the reins. He sensed that this something else had gone now. If it hadn't, he would not have been awake. The way was wide open for him to regain possession of what was rightfully his. But he had to find the way. So he tried.

He tried, and felt himself moving a little bit closer, felt his body lying as near to him as a loyal wife to a good husband, but he couldn't seem to bridge those last few inches. He tried not to panic. He knew he had to keep calm. He thought that maybe if he managed to reconstruct the events that had led to this loss, then perhaps he could find a way of rediscovering his body. He tried this, but the past was beyond him and he could not find it either. So he tried another way. He tried to remember how it was to see and smell and hear and feel. He stretched his senses—and was that an odor? *No*—but wasn't that the feel of cool air rustling his skin and hair? *No*—but wasn't that the hum of a passing airplane? Or—*yes*—the smell of bacon popping in an open skillet.

Struggling and straining, Tallsman all at once found that his eyes were open.

There was a flat expanse of cracked knotted wood lying directly above him. Here and there, a rusty bent nail protruded from the wood, and there were wide gaps where flashes of blue and white gleamed like water.

Then a voice penetrated: "So you've decided to wake up. It's about time you joined us. It's already late."

Turning his head, Tallsman focused on the object beside him. It took a moment, but he recognized her. "Corlin," he said. "I was having a dream where I'd lost control of my body. Something else was running me."

"I hope you got it back," she said.

"I think so." He noticed himself wiping sleep from his eyes. Angrily, he dropped his hands and turned to study his surroundings. There was more wood and more nails; much cool morning air, and another object. He spoke to this object: "August."

August said, "Good morning, Mr. Tallsman," in a crisp boyish voice.

Tallsman turned back to Corlin and regarded her closely. There was something about her and another place. Another time. Yes, it was yesterday.

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For a moment, he saw it clearly, then yesterday seemed to slide away from him till it was as far away as last year. He asked her what she was doing here.

"August sent for me. He has something he wants me to do."

"What's that?"

"Nothing."

He had his senses and body under strict control now. He managed to clear a large part of the fog from his memory. He knew they were sitting on the floor of his children's treehouse, which meant they were in the yard behind his house. He remembered about August and Milinqua and Rogirsen and all of last night.

"He wants you to do something for him too," Corlin said.

Tallsman spoke to August: "You were asleep last night, or unconscious, when I brought you here. Do you remember what happened?"

"Yes," August said.

"Well, I don't. What happened at the cabin?"

"They let him go," Corlin said. "He came to Larkin's office and made them release us. August changed the children. I saw them."

"Steven?" Tallsman asked.

"Yes. That's what August wants you to do for him. He wants you to take him to the children. They've got Melissa but the others are waiting at the cabin."

"That's not a very safe place."

"August says it is."

"He ought to know," Tallsman said. "But where are you going to be?"

"I have to go into town."

He shrugged and crawled away from her. "We might as well get going," he said, sticking his head into the light of day and glancing downward at the earth. The morning breeze moved evenly around him, carrying the promise of a clean day. Above, the sun was bright and rising in the sky. The madrona leaves turned fitfully in the air.

Climbing carefully down the ladder, Tallsman stretched his tired muscles. After a moment, August came after him. They reached the ground and crossed the yard together. As they passed the house, Tallsman listened and he thought he heard Stephanie and the children moving inside. He did not know what time it was but he guessed it was early yet. His family had only recently emerged from their beds. Stephanie would be cooking breakfast in the kitchen and preparing the children for school, and if he had been there, he would have been at the kitchen table, watching her cook, maybe eating already or sipping a cup of coffee, or maybe just doing nothing, sitting and thinking about the coming day. In ten or fifteen minutes, he and the children would leave the house. He would climb in the car and turn it toward the school and drive away while the children would stand at the corner and wait for the bus to come and take them to school. That would make it nine o'clock. He thought about Stephanie alone now in the empty house. Was she thinking about him? Did she know he was here? Had she seen the car parked in front of the house and wondered about it? He hadn't seen her in a day or more and they hadn't talked since that one night when he had offered her a final chance and she had refused to take advantage of it. He

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hadn't even been able to think much of her lately. There had been too many other things on his mind, and she had long ago ceased to play an essential role in his life. But she was his wife. He had to keep reminding himself of that. So what if Corlin were his lover, and so what if yesterday afternoon had been better than all the many afternoons which had preceded it, those with Stephanie, even those he had spent with his first wife? Perhaps he could ask August to help Stephanie. Wasn't that why he was here? If so, what was he doing running around helping children by turning them into enlightened gods, boys ten years old and girls who were thirteen and fourteen? Why couldn't he help some of the millions of adult, full-grown men and women in the world who really needed a breath of life blown into their sagging souls? Like Stephanie. Or himself. Or Rogirsen. Now that had been the right way of using his powers. But why Melissa and the other children? He almost stopped and asked August why, pointing to the house, but he did not. They were already sitting in the car and it was time to go.

Tallsman set the directional equipment for the school and the car slipped away from the house. Turning, he took a last look at his home and thought he glimpsed a flash of pale white crossing the window. But he wasn't sure.

He said, "I think my wife saw us. She might do something. She thinks you're a spy."

"No, that's all right," said August.

Tallsman nodded. He should have known better. Of course it was all right—well then, fine. If he had been August, it would have been all right with him too. But would he want to be August? He glanced at his companion as the car swerved onto the road which led to the school, tires slicing through ankle-deep mud and spraying water high against the windshield. Tallsman knew that he had never been able to understand August. Even before, when August had been just another twelve year old lower student, his origins somewhat clouded by a faint hint of mystery, even then he had never seemed to possess more than a bare functional rudimentary surface personality. Now, supposedly changed and transformed, reborn into a state of true enlightenment, a legitimate figure of cosmic mystery, he was even more of a cypher than before. He was not at all like Melissa or Rogirsen. There was no aura of wisdom and maturity about him, no clinging halo of glimmering awareness. He acted as one would expect a twelve year old boy to act. There didn't seem to be anything about him which one could firmly grasp hold of, except a handful of interchangeable facial expressions, a nod and a shake and an occasional smile, a deepening frown, a voice heavily tinged by adolescence, a vocabulary that was colorless and bare. Tallsman had always liked August, but he had never come near to feeling that he understood him. No—wait—that wasn't right. He saw that now. He had understood August, and he did now, and that was the problem, for he had to assume that there was more to the boy than what he could see, that no one of August's age could be as limited and empty as this boy seemed. For someone so young, August was almost totally lack-

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ing in individual personality distinctions. He blended with the general mass of students, and this was surprising, because nearly all children are truly and distinctly individual; it's only when they grow older and approach the brink of adulthood that they begin to take upon themselves the accepted personality characteristics of those around them, only then that they willingly fade into the mass of common humanity. Some didn't, of course. But only a few. Larkin, for one, never had, but Tallsman could not think of any others he personally knew.

August told Tallsman to stop the car. Tallsman stopped the car and then August told him to move it off the road and park it behind a stand of trees, where it would not be visible from the road. Tallsman complied and then they walked into the woods, moving down what appeared to be an abandoned dirt road, one not used in many years since it was so badly overgrown with weeds and bushes that it blended naturally with the surrounding terrain.

"The cabin's at the end of this road," said August.

Tallsman nodded and walked along. He wanted to ask August if he could explain some of the things he had been thinking about, but he was hesitant to ask. For one thing it sounded so absurd: Can you explain to me why you don't happen to have a personality? Most people do, you know. Why not you, August? Don't you need to be a person? And for another, he was afraid that August might not be able to explain. He might not know—or worse yet, he would explain, but the explanation would be something Tallsman preferred not to hear. He made an effort to force all these unpleasant thoughts into some dark and secluded corner of his mind. He tried instead to concentrate on something else, something better. Like Corlin. He plucked a past image of her from his memory and studied it carefully. It was an image that should have excited him. At the very least, it should have pleased him. But it did neither. It was a clear and firm image too, but that was wrong as well, for Tallsman knew that when he really wanted to think of an image it was almost impossible to do so, that the image kept shifting and blurring and becoming something or someone else, something different. It was only when he did not really care that he could evoke a mental image as clear as this one, as unblurred as a fine photograph. He let Corlin go. He told her to go back to from where she had come, and concentrated instead on the road. They came to the creek and it was narrow here and they both jumped it and continued onward. Tallsman started to tell August about last night, about how he and Rogirsen had followed the creek through the night and seen the trees like sentinels standing above and then leaning down and blocking the moon and stars, but August said no, he knew all about it, and Tallsman returned his attention to the road.

They came to the cabin. In the light of day, it appeared more ravaged and beaten than it had last night. Tallsman could see grass growing tall on the broken roof, and there was no longer a feeling of mystery about the place. That too had gone with the night. Here

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was an old cabin, where a series of old men had once lived, and now that the men were gone and dead, the cabin was going with them. Tallsman heard voices coming from inside and he guessed that the children were there. He waited outside, obediently, while August passed inside. He sat in the wet grass that circled the cabin like a collar of green and plucked a moist blade from the ground and put it between his lips. He chewed the grass. It tasted sweet and moist and cool.

He tried to listen to the children, but they had fallen silent as soon as August entered the cabin or else they were whispering very softly. Something was up, Tallsman knew, but he also knew that he really did not give a damn. It was as if he had reached the end of a long and treacherous road only to discover that the road had run a circle and that he had returned to his point of departure. Now the others were eager to begin the journey again, but not him. He was content to stay where he was, sitting on the ground, chewing the grass. He thought it was a good life for him.

Time continued to pass and Tallsman continued to think, but finally August came out of the cabin. The children followed him. There were four of them, two girls and two boys, and Tallsman knew them all. He said hello to each in turn. August said, "We're going to the school now."

"Is that safe?" Tallsman asked.

"We have to go," one of the girls answered. Her name was Lorcas. She was a pretty girl. Thirteen, maybe fourteen, but still a lower. She was the kind of pretty girl who would make a beautiful woman. Her eyes were big and bright like two blue moons. She smiled at him and added, "August says so."

"All right," said Tallsman, speaking only because he wanted an extra moment in which to study the girl. She had changed, he decided. It was definitely there. Her eyes were bigger than ever, he decided, but now they sparkled with a sense of maturity that had never been there before, and her voice and stance and posture were those of a woman, not a young girl.

Before he had a chance to look at the others, they began to move away from the cabin. He hurried and fell into line, walking at the rear behind Lorcas. He watched her walking, her hips shifting easily beneath her thin white summer's dress, her shoulders riding high and taut against the fabric of the garment and her hair brushing against her bare arms, twitched and twirled by the wind. Taking two quick steps, he drew even with her, then walked at her side.

"Are you happy now?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

MICHAEL ROGIRSEN: BROKEN SANCTUARY

"I DON'T UNDERSTAND," he said.

"You will, you will," cried Larkin, his hands becoming fists which pounded his desk, then as mere hands returning again to his chest. "I have to tell someone, and you're here. No one else is here, so please please listen to me, remember what I tell you, and when I'm gone, consider it, think of

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what I've said, and maybe you will be able to understand. Someone must know before I'm gone and I can't wait any longer to talk."

"Yes, all right," said Rogirsen, who did not understand. Not yet.

Sunlight sliced through the open window, spilling across the room in a flickering but even line and painting Larkin's face with orange and yellow when it reached him, but he appeared not to notice. His hands were held firmly across his chest, and his chair was shoved back from the desk. The top of the desk was bare, with two glaring exceptions. The first of these exceptions was a sheet of white typewriter paper, the clean surface of which was marred by a series of large handwritten scrawls. Leaning forward from where he sat, Rogirsen tried to read these scrawls but he could not quite fix them in his eye. But he knew what they meant. He did not have to read them to know what they meant. What they meant was:

> Taking my own life because this way is the only way to ensure continued existence for those who deserve it far more than me. Eighty year old man here writing and the last ten of these years have been lived while dead and now I want to go to the grave where all dead men ought to lie. I have a reason for wanting to go now, and I have never had such a good reason before. It's easier this way than waiting for the slow consuming teeth down inside me to come clawing up to end it the slow, painful way. Maybe this means I'm a coward but there's no way for me to know this for sure. I suppose I'll never be able to know. Since I'll be dead.

The note had not been signed. The second exception was a gun. Rogirsen knew next to nothing about guns, but this one looked big and bright and dark and shiny. It was black.

"Listen to me," cried Larkin.

"I'm listening," Rogirsen said. He lifted a hand and shaded his eyes, though the sun stood at his back and his eyes were already firmly encased within the shadows. He performed this gesture for Larkin's benefit, but the old man did not appear to notice or care. Rogirsen said, "May I turn off the light? It's very bright in here now."

"Yes yes of course–but, Michael, please listen. I must hurry."

Rogirsen went and switched off the overhead electric light. The room darkened imperceptibly, and he returned and stood across from Larkin, watching the old man's quivering hands trembling against his tossing lungs. Rogirsen sought to glimpse this man as something less than evil, struggled to discern the humanity which surely lay inside him, wanting to make him into something more real and definite than a private and personal devil. Who was this man as a man except a tired old man who talked about the inconsequential aspects of suicide? Was this man the same man who had ridden his life like a winged demon for so many years? It hardly seemed possible. But I've changed too, Rogirsen thought.

But he did not know. He knew he had a headache and he wished he had been able to sleep last night. Of course

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if he could have slept, he would have slept and been sleeping now. He would not be here. At dawn he had seen the light shining and had come, surprised by his own need for human contact. He had found Larkin. Exactly like this.

"Are you through now, Michael? Are you going to listen to me now? You can't make me stop. Not this way. So stop trying and just listen. I have to get these things out of my system and I know you don't mind."

"I don't mind," confirmed Rogirsen. "I'll listen."

"Good, good, fine, fine. Then listen. It began the day they bought my soul—am I being dramatic?—and that happened years ago when I first began to feel the pains in my stomach. I guessed what it had to mean and I went to them and they told me yes. And they said if you live out your life and keep in step, never trying anything new, then we'll provide you with a life to live. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Rogirsen, who truly understood. Not from Larkin's jambling phrases, inarticulate as they were, but from the pictures which accompanied those words, the visions that churned and snapped behind his eyes. These visions were not something new. Rogirsen had been seeing them as long as he could remember. People talked and he saw what they were talking about. But always before the pictures had been faint and blurred and not even there unless he concentrated upon them to the exclusion of all else, including the conversation itself, and if he concentrated upon the pictures and lost the conversation, then he saw the pictures but he did not know what they meant, so he usually ignored them, acted as if they were not really there, but this time they were clear and for a moment they frightened him, the fierce colorful intensity of these visions, but then he was not afraid any longer, because the pictures grabbed him and swept him up and forced him to watch and listen. The pictures were too powerful to permit fear.

Larkin said, "Good, then listen." He said, "All of this is only a prelude to the true events that began the day they came to me and said we have created this creature in our laboratories the same way we created those perfect soldiers who now do our fighting for us, but this one is different and we don't quite know what to make of him because we don't think he's achieved full maturity yet, so what we want you to do, Larkin, is take him in and let him live here at your school and see how he reacts in a normal but controlled environment. Mr. Milinqua, the local area supervisor, is aware of all this, and as soon as anything untoward happens with our creature, we want you to report the fact to Mr. Milinqua immediately. The creature will have the surface appearance and knowledge and attitudes of a common nine year old boy. And I agreed, of course, since I'd been agreeing with them for years and didn't know what else to do, having the habit of saying yes without thinking, and they fixed it up so that Tallsman and I stumbled upon the boy one day and took him in. For several years, nothing happened. And then it did that night when it finally did happen, and I made my report and Milinqua came rushing out to investigate.

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We sparred and Steven came into the room and I tossed him some hints and August went and disappeared, but then I discovered exactly what they had given me, when we found Melissa I saw it, and I knew that August was not some special breed of monster but instead what he was was the end result of all my years of teaching, and then I couldn't turn him in. It would have meant turning myself in, the same thing, my whole life. Nor was I sure about anything by this time. I thought: Why is this boy the way he is? Did they plan it this way? Is it because of their tampering with him in the laboratory, cutting genes and splicing molecules, or is it because of what we have done to him here, Corlin and I, pushing him back and opening his lives so that, seeing, he has become what he now is? And they had never told me anything about him. And I had never dared ask. They had never said this creature is one who can merge with other normal human beings the way certain lower animals can merge with others of their kind. They never told me that, never explained anything, and maybe they didn't know either. Maybe that means I'm right and it was me and it was Corlin. Maybe it was Intensive Therapy. I think they thought they had created another of their human weapons, like the soldiers, a machine made out of flesh and blood without either feeling or soul. Now he's free. They won't want me now. I've turned on them by turning back to what I've always believed. That leaves me with only one way out."

Rogirsen said, "Yes, I understand."

"You do?" Larkin reached down and patted the gun. Lifting it, he turned it slowly in his hands as if it were a toy.

"Not that," Rogirsen said. "I mean I understand about August."

"You do? Well, I suppose you should. He's helped you, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Rogirsen said. "He has helped me. And I was thinking. Perhaps he can help you too."

"Don't say that," said Larkin.

"Why not?" Rogirsen shrugged. "You don't want to die, do you? If you do, forget it."

"I don't want to die."

"Then don't hurry your way into it. Wait for August. What can it hurt?"

"Nothing," said Larkin. He dropped the gun and it clattered noisely against the desk. "I think I've been acting like a fool."

"Probably," Rogirsen said.

Larkin lowered his head and caught it with his hands. "Do you really think he can help me? Are you just saying that to make me stop? Don't be afraid to tell me the truth." He jerked his head at the gun. "I won't use it."

"He helped me. I don't see why he can't help you."

"It's different."

"Not really. I was suffering from a disease the same as you. Mine was a disease of the mind and yours is a disease of the body. That's the only difference."

"I'll ask him," Larkin said. "I'm ready for him now. I need some peace. Everything has—"

"I'm not peaceful," Rogirsen said. "Or enlightened. I'm normal. And I had to get that way by myself. August didn't save me. He just let me glimpse

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the world outside myself for a few hours. After that, it was up to me."

Larkin was laughing. "This is funny. You saving my life when for years you would have killed me if I'd allowed you half an opportunity."

"I said I was normal now."

"So I see."

"And I feel I owe you something."

"How?"

"Because you let me live here. I was dangerous, especially to you, and you let me stay. You could have had me locked up."

"You were my failure. Corlin was my success. Or so I thought. I let both of you stay."

"I owe you something for that."

"Perhaps you do. I can't say. But at least I've told my story now, and that's something. Wait and wait, I suppose. What else can we do except that? Wait and see what happens tomorrow—isn't that the way it has to be?—and if I'm going to die, then I suppose I'll just go ahead and do it. For a while there, I thought I had a reason for going now. But all I was was tired, very tired."

"I came here to tell you that I'd forgiven you. I suppose I can say that now."

"Thank you," Larkin said.

"And I wanted to ask if you could forgive me."

"I could, yes. But I don't have anything to forgive you for. I really wish I did."

"Thank you," Rogirsen said. Getting to his feet, he crossed the room and looked out the window straight at the sun. He watched the brightness of morning light and saw, distantly, trees waving happily in the breeze, and nearby was the faint blue slash of the creek, and near that stood the strong flat roof of his cottage. Rogirsen knew he would be leaving here soon. Maybe he ought to go today—go right now. This wasn't his home any longer. He had finally graduated. It was time to take a look at the rest of the world.

"I don't even have any idea what it's like out there," he said, facing the window. "What's happened to the rest of the world while I've been locked up here, living in a nightmare?"

"Nothing you would have wanted to have seen."

"Maybe not," Rogirsen said. "There's somebody coming." He put his nose against the glass and watched the straggling figures coming slowly toward the school. Their outlines wavered uncertainly, shifting like mirages beneath the heavy light. But he knew they were real and he knew who they were. He turned to tell Larkin.

"It's Corlin," he said. "And Milinqua. And two other men. I suppose they're looking for August. I suppose it's not over yet."

"I didn't think it was," Larkin said. "Corlin, you say?"

"Yes, she's with them."

"You had better go yourself, Michael. They'll want you if they know you're here."

"Yes, you're right," Rogirsen said. He went to the door. "Good-bye," he said.

"Come back if you can," Larkin said.

"I'll try." He left, not looking back and moved down the corridor toward the outside. Passing closed doors, he heard the hum of voices from behind them and realized it was much later

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than he had thought. There was an open door and he paused a moment and glanced through. The class was proceeding well. A teacher stood beside the blackboard, where strange white scrawls nibbled at the edges of wisdom, and a student said, ". . . but that's the part I don't understand." Then the teacher was explaining that part, and Rogirsen knew it was time to go. He went away, resuming his previous course. His footsteps echoed, ricocheting off the walls and ceiling. Tossing open a door, he fled. He dashed ahead into the lighted world of the sun.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

CORLIN MCGEE: REALM OF MAGIC

"I BELIEVE WE'RE GOING to have a fine day today," said Milinqua, as they crossed the grounds.

"Yes," Corlin agreed, glancing briefly at the bright cloudless sky above and continuing to walk as quickly as possible, trying to keep pace with this man who walked as though walking were an exercise requiring no more effort than sleeping. But Corlin did not want to walk this quickly. She would rather have dropped to her knees and crawled toward the school, for she was no longer as certain as she had been a moment before that this course was the right one to follow. But he had told her that he wanted it done, and when he had said it, she had not seen anything wrong with his thinking, but now she was beginning to wonder.

"I hope Joyce is here," Milinqua said, "It will be so much easier that way."

"Yes," Corlin said, turning slightly as she walked and glancing behind at the men who followed. Rutgers was walking quite close and moving almost as quickly as she and Milinqua, but Ford trailed well behind, his hands jammed in his pockets, his eyes firmly fixed on the ground. She did not like to have either of these men walking this close to her, but there was nothing she could do about it. Milinqua, himself, did not seem so bad. There was a spark of kindness about him. His friendliness seemed genuine enough. But why would August want to see him? That was the part that was hard to understand. When he had said it, it had sounded so sensible. He had said he was tired of running and hiding and she could understand that. But wouldn't they just take him away? Put him in prison or something? She thought so, but August must have known that too. So then, why?

"Do you know what strikes me about this place?" Milinqua asked, glancing toward her and smiling pleasantly. "The pureness of it, the genuine whiteness of your grass and dirt, the school rising in the distance like a palace. Have you ever comprehended how medieval your existence is here? I see your school as a palace, your creek as a circling river, and your few cottages and dormitories as the domiciles of your serfs. Or is it the town where your serfs live? I think my analogy fails at both points. You live in the town, though, don't you? And I imagine you've seen very little of the world beyond. Well, truthfully, that's fine. Let me advise you: Don't. Stay here as long as you are able. After the unworldly seclusion of this life, the rest

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of the world will seem like a truly horrible place to you. You're like a medieval monastery here. You're keeping wisdom alive in the face of dark forces running wild throughout the rest of the world."

"No," said Corlin, shaking her head.

"Well, I didn't expect you to agree with me. I imagine you think I'm criticizing you or Doctor Larkin or your work. But that's not so. I'm trying to pay you a compliment. You can't imagine how I wish I could have spent my boyhood in a place like this. My childhood was a narrow street packed tight with beggars and thieves and gamblers and whores. That's what I meant by the rest of the world being horrible. Perhaps, to me, the opposite is true, and your school is a source of fear. I hope not, but for others I know this is true. Take my assistants as an example. Take Mr. Ford in particular. He is truly afraid of you and Doctor Larkin and this school. I have heard him talk. His hatred for you runs very deep indeed."

This time, Corlin did not reply. She was tired of answering him, nodding a yes or shaking a no, making futile stabs at conversation while the moment drew closer and closer with every new step. Suddenly, she hoped Larkin was not there, that he had stayed home and slept, but she knew that wasn't likely, and even if it were true, it could not matter. The school was coming closer now, so close that she could reach out and touch it. She didn't touch it, but here was the door.

"Hey—look!"

"Stop him—hey!"

"You there—hey—come back!"

Turning with Milinqua, Corlin saw Rogirsen streaking across the grounds. Rutgers and Ford stopped shouting and raced after him. Rogirsen ran straight for the woods, and she stood, watching, until he reached the first of the trees and disappeared between them. They would not catch him in there. She knew that. But Rutgers and Ford did not. They went after him.

Milinqua said, "They won't catch him there."

Corlin said, "No."

"Well, in that case, no use poking here. They'll know where to find us. Come along."

Together, they entered the building, marching sharply down the corridor toward Larkin's office. Corlin listened to the sounds of passing classrooms, young voices lifted in learning, and she marveled at the normality of the day. It didn't seem right somehow, but she could see there really wasn't any choice. What did she expect Larkin to do? Dismiss all the classes? Declare a holiday, a day of internal mourning?

Larkin was alone in the office, seated behind his desk. He looked all right to her, healthy and rested. Except for the gun and his folded hands, the top of the desk was bare. Larkin said, "I wanted to give this to you." He balanced the weapon in the palm of his hand. "I saw you coming and drew it out."

"When I leave," Milinqua said, "remind me to take it. What is it for?"

"I've had it for years. As a precaution. But I don't think it's safe. Not with the children."

"I see," Milinqua said. "Wasn't that one of your men who was just running

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away from us? I forget his name . . ."

"Michael Rogirsen," Corlin said.

"Yes, that's it. Tell me, Joyce, why was he running?"

"He's been transformed."

"Well, that explains it." Milinqua smiled shyly. "I'm afraid Miss McGee forgot to tell me about that. Well, that makes—how many?—seven, isn't it? Something like that. The children who were holding me captive last night—they too were caught."

"I thought so," Larkin said, sounding distracted.

"But what was odd, I barely caught a glimpse of the boy myself. Not even then, with him close enough to touch, because when he arrived, it was very late and I was nearly asleep and it was very dark inside the cabin. We had no light. Too bad, for as you can imagine, I was quite curious. Still, I soon ought to have my chance to meet him."

"Why is that? Have you found him?"

"You don't know?"

"How can I know? I haven't seen August since the first night."

"That's a pity—but it isn't significant."

"August is coming here," Corlin said. "I saw him this morning and he asked me to arrange a meeting. Tallsman is with him now."

"But why?" Larkin said.

"I think he wants to go away."

"But why here?"

"I think he intends to bring the other children with him.

"And you don't know why?"

"He didn't explain anything to me," Corlin said. "That's what makes it strange, because this morning when he told me, I didn't think anything of it. He said for me to do it and I just went ahead and did it exactly like he'd said. But now I'm not so sure. I don't know. Don't you think he has to know what he's doing? I know you haven't seen him, but he's still the same, but in other ways he's changed too. I can't understand it."

"He's only a twelve year old boy," Larkin said. "Maybe he's afraid."

"I don't think so," Corlin said. "I don't think anything could frighten him, because I don't think anything could harm him. Not unless he wanted it to."

Milinqua interrupted: "I can tell you this much, Joyce: If the boy does indeed come here and he surrenders himself willingly to me, then I will ensure that my final report is modified accordingly and that you receive all the credit you properly deserve. And I feel it will be best that way for everyone concerned. I don't want you to think I'm doing you a personal favor. I'm not. I simply cannot see any legitimate reason why you ought to fall needlessly into disfavor with certain important parties. Do you understand?"

Larkin said that he did. He thanked Milinqua for the favor.

Milinqua had gone to the window. He stood with his hands resting against the wall, his legs spaced evenly beneath him, and his face pushed near the glass. He said, "Here are my men at last. I see we guessed correctly, Miss McGee. They are quite alone. But, well, there is really no place a man can run where we cannot find him in time. Perhaps I had better go out and reassure my men. I don't want them to think they have failed me."

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He started toward the door, and Corlin said, "I think I'll stay here. If you don't mind."

"Yes," Milinqua said. "I think that would be best."

When she was alone with Larkin, Corlin stood nervously across from his desk and waited for him to speak, but he said nothing, simply returning her gaze and grinning. Then he shook his shoulders, lowered his grin and looked at the gun he held loosely in his hand. He began tossing it easily into the air and catching it, moving cautiously as though the gun were a fragile glass. Corlin watched, but he still said nothing, so she went to the window and looked out at the school grounds. It was definitely going to be a good day. It might even be hot. If nothing else, she was sure of the weather. The sky was clear and bare and naked like a well-scrubbed face and faraway sunlight glinted narrowly against distant trees. She kept standing and staring and waiting for him to speak, but he said nothing. The gun popped up and the gun fell down, spinning in the air. Larkin caught it by the barrel, flipped it again, let it turn once in the air and caught it. He never faltered. Not once. He watched it turning, his eyes shining bright, and she wondered why it always had to end this way. Sheridan and Tallsman and now Larkin himself. How many others to come? When would she find someone who would listen even after it was over?

"Here he comes," she said. "It's him."

She felt Larkin's presence at her side. His hand gripped her wrist. He said, "Are those the other ones? The four?"

"Yes," she said. "No—wait," she said. "One of them isn't there."

"You're right. There's only three. And August."

"One of the girls is missing. There's Steven and Lynda and Thomas."

"Milinqua has seen them."

And they both watched as the four small figures emerged from the woods and went one way while the three larger figures turned away from the school and went another way. Then all seven came together in a group between the woods and the school, near the woods. They stood close to the creek, which swept indifferently past them, and they were talking. She thought they were talking.

"I wish I knew what they were saying," she said.

"Don't you know?" His hand found her hand and squeezed tightly.

"No, I don't," she said, her hand held loose.

Chapter Thirty

Gregory Tallsman: Iron Bars and Glass Walls

The forest held tightly clinging around him now, each tree separately swaying in the breeze as though individually placed by some giant hand in such a fashion as to confirm the worst of his suspicions of unnatural confinement. Tallsman marched compliantly with the children, but his feelings were not helped by the manner in which August led the party, slipping between closely growing trees with only inches between their towering trunks, dropping to the ground and crawling beneath heavy thorn bushes that blan-

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keted the invisible path they were following, sliding on hands and knees through mud and dirt. When they had first moved away from the cabin and into the woods, Tallsman had intended to continue his conversation with the girl Lorcas, but he had soon become far too busily involved with the dulling processes of moving relentlessly forward. He had no energy left to expend at talking. He was following the girl and she was following the boy ahead of her and the chain proceeded inexorably onward to August himself. From previous rain, the forest was damp and all of their clothing was speckled by bits of dark clinging mud. Tallsman tried his best to ignore it, for now the sun beamed precariously from one corner of the sky. It certainly looked like a good day coming. He was happy about that.

Nor did he know their final destination. He thought it unlikely that this hike was merely a hike, a walk in the early morning, a chance to see the forest as yet undisturbed by the gathering sun, so he guessed they must be heading for the school, but only because the school was the only place they could be heading. If so, why hadn't they continued along the creek and gone straight to the school that way and avoided all this crawling and sliding and slithering? And why did they want him along? Or did they? Lorcas for one had acted friendly and glad to see him (telling him how much she enjoyed his classes, though he could not remember ever having seen her there) but none of the others had said a word to him, and he was beginning to feel like a man stranded deeply in the bowels of some nameless foreign city surrounded by a million men but unable to communicate a simple thought to them. These children, whoever or whatever they had become, spies or visitors or gods of destiny, did not lessen his anxiety. And what was worse: Of them all, it was August who seemed the most genuinely human. August. Not the others, some of whom he had known and taught for years. They were not quite human. Not a one of them. Not even Lorcas. Once, he had known them all well; now they were strangers again.

But wait. So here it was, after all. Strange that he hadn't noticed it coming. The forest cracked and parted in front of him, exposing a green, rolling, neatly-trimmed expanse of grass, which ran forward at a hurrying pace only to stop short at the brink of the distant school building. August lifted a hand and the children halted. They were still fairly well concealed. A tall hedge of untamed bushes separated the edge of the forest from the land beyond. Turning, August whispered something to Steven. Tallsman could not hear. The others nodded sharply as though they had.

While the children awaited further orders, Tallsman took a few steps to the right so that he could see through an opening in the hedge. There was someone standing out there, but he could not see clearly. No, there were two people standing out there and, as he watched, a third figure came out of the building and joined the others. Could August see them? Not with his eyes—not unless he had developed the ability to see through leaves and wood. Tallsman thought to warn him, but it

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was already too late. Moving forward, August pushed his way through the hedge and stepped into view. The three figures saw him, turned and approached. The children went after August. Tallsman gulped a breath of air, swept his arm forward and caught Lorcas around the neck. She fell, and he pulled her back, then dropped above her, stifling her screams. But she wasn't screaming, he realized, and he did not move. He had recognized the approaching figures and remembered their proper names but now it was too late to warn any of the others but at least he had saved this girl. Drawing her deeper into the forest, he dropped down again, lying across her body. He could still see a wide section of the lawn. August and Steven and Lynda and Thomas continued forward. So did Milinqua and Rutgers and Ford, moving fast. Then they met.

They were standing together near the creek. Tallsman thought they were talking. Milinqua and August, they were talking. Tallsman thought it was a pleasing sight. It looked as if seven good friends had unexpectedly met on the final hole of the country golf course after completing the day's round and now they were discussing their games, the heat, their wives and husbands and mutual friends. Plans were being formulated for dinner and afterward. Lying softly on the wet ground, the odor of mud in his nostrils, his hands cold and shivering, Lorcas moving to his side, her head tucked close to the ground, Tallsman watched. Near and around, the forest turned and swept, deeply still.

Then it seemed as if he could see everything. His eyes acted like a zoom lens, drawing close to the focal scene. He made a wrong turn, then another before his eyes finally focused. There was a bare rock squatting deep in the high grass. A window flashed (too far—back up—but hadn't that been a face?) and then he found them. He saw Milinqua, then Steven (his eyes circling the scene) then Lynda, then Thomas, then Ford. Here was Rutgers's huge black glowering face. Then August, young and powerful and waiting. Then Milinqua again, seen better now, more distinctly, closer, his dark heavy eyes concealed by eyebrows as wide as a grown man's thumb, his sloping nose and inclined jaw, his brown heavy hands curling with tufts of black hair. A gun in his hand. The gun went up, the eyes went with it, moving ponderously, slowly, heavy as a big rock.

Milinqua aimed the gun and fired.

August fell.

The shot was clean. It hit him high on the forehead a fraction of an inch below his hairline.

August toppled and was dead.

Then back. Then all the children, gazing at August down on the ground. The children frozen stiff and straight and solid as a still photograph. Even Ford. Or Rutgers. For a long moment, nobody moved a muscle.

Then everything was moving and his eyes were back where they belonged. He heard himself saying: "He's dead—he killed him."

And then he was slapping Lorcas across the mouth. She was lying, or sitting, or kneeling near to him. She had not moved, so he was slapping her, holding her head straight and hitting

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her with the flat of one hand. As he struck her again and again, his hand burned like fire. Her mouth opened once as though she intended to speak. Blinking, she said nothing. He slapped her and pulled her. He wanted to run but he wasn't going to run alone. She spoke, so softly that he barely heard. She said, "Why? Why? He . . ."

"Come on." And he was dragging her through the woods, plowing over and between bushes, and then she was running and pulling and she fell, stumbling. She ran with tears in her eyes, sayind, "Why? Why? He . . ."

Tallsman didn't know how long they ran, because the next thing he knew they were walking. They walked deep within the forest. Her clothes were torn and ripped, one long strip trailing behind and flopping like a colorful tail. He kept his hands in his pockets, thick with filth and mud, and tasted blood draining from cuts and scrapes and open wounds, blood sprinkled across his face like red raindrops, flowing between his lips and running down his throat. He tasted blood and swallowed.

They came to a tree. Tallsman looked up. The tree was very tall. A hundred feet, two hundred, he couldn't tell. It was old too. He stepped close to it and tried to wrap his arms around the trunk but his hands missed touching by a yard or more. This was no ordinary tree; it had to be the oldest and biggest in the forest. Whatever, it was a good place to rest. They sat down together beneath its branches.

Lorcas leaned close to his chest and wept against him. She was crying out of grief—no, he thought, not that—what?— relief?

"I don't care if he's dead," she said, later.

"Why? I don't—"

She put her finger against his lips, then the finger opened, parted, spread, and she put her hand against his hand, and all the fingers opened, parted, spread, his fingers and her fingers just like one, and then like clay flowing gently together. Tallsmen felt nothing, watching. Eight fingers were one finger. Fatter than before. A bright shiny thumb. A bent wrist, one wrist only, with blood and veins, but all the same.

She buried her face in his chest, cracking the skin, parting it, gnawing suddenly at his heart.

Then, screaming, he tried to stand, but his feet were locked in her thighs, his toes spread within her knees. Her clothes opened, gliding away from her body, exposing her skin, and then it was just the two of them. Nothing between.

Tallsman felt dirty, lying inside her.

Was he screaming now? He wanted to scream but he wasn't sure if he could. He tried again, but his mouth lay very near her eyes and he was afraid of hurting her with his teeth. So he kept his lips sealed. His own eyes saw nothing but dark interior flesh, yet her vision afforded him bright tempting glimpses of the old tree endlessly spinning, whirling, leaves fluttering like green sails in a raw wind.

So he was no longer screaming.

No use; too late; he was lost. Or—was it won?

One?

The tree wavered.

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He began to sense the meaning of . . .

He thought: And on and on and on. Endlessly, he saw it.

The tree was going to fall.

Chapter Thirty-One

CHORUS: ONE OF US WILL SOON BE YOU

SO HERE LAY the boy's poor body, lonely and awkward beneath the approaching clouds of noon. Above the lawn it was lying, and when it was eventually moved, a bare spotting depression would remain, a few crushed blades of grass in a vaguely human shape, but night would soon be falling, then passing, and dawn would then be coming, and when it came, even that would be gone. What would then remain as proof? A grave, perhaps, but far from here. A covered hole deep in the earth. Or more importantly, here and there, a few scattered recollections buried within the minds of a handful of men and women, boys and girls. These recollections would represent the boy's soul claim to a transient sort of immortality. Nothing else would remain.

So both the man who was very old (Joyce Larkin) and the woman who was considerably younger (Corlin McGee) came down from the school to gaze upon the boy's poor body. It was the old man who knelt down, moistening his hands in the thick grass, and felt the dead veins of the boy's wrist while the woman turned and gazed down the road, watching the departing motor car gliding gracefully away in the direction of the warming sun. She wished it well, now that it had gone, but to the old man she seemed strangely troubled. He did not quite understand. More at ease under these circumstances, more familiar with sudden death, he sought to reassure her.

—I wonder why he . . . (she began).

—Came here? Now I don't think . . . (he said).

—Not that he could ever have expected. Not this. But why did they kill him?

—To end it. To put a final finishing chapter on a long story. Say it however you want to say it. A man once wrote that every story has its natural end in death if you bother to carry it far enough forward. All life—everything—is actually a tragedy.

—Oh, don't be morbid. Really, Joyce. This isn't the time. We have enough to worry about. What are we going to do now? You and me and the others? Tell me that.

—I suppose we go back to teaching. And learning. Or both. That isn't morbid, is it? Go back to doing what we've always done before and doing it as well as we can. What else can I say?

—Of course. Say it. And Rogirsen? What about him? Or Melissa? The other children? Lynda and Steven and Lorcas and Thomas? What about them? Always details. Are you going to write their parents and explain? At least August had nobody except you and me.

—They're gone now. We're forgotten. Nothing has changed. Nothing ever changes except, perhaps, change itself.

—Oh no. Don't say it. Is that all you

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can say? Nothing changes. Why do all old men end up sounding like senile Chinese patriarchs? Does something turn rotten in the blood after eighty years?

The conversation had reached its natural end, so they turned together and went back toward the school, leaving the body where it lay, heavy with pints of useless blood, eyes wide open, skin as clean and pure and sparkling as a baby's. August was dead.

Nearby, on the road between town and school, Antonio Milinqua, local area supervisor, sat scribbling hasty notes in a handsized spiral notebook. The car in which he was riding was exceedingly crowded, its two narrow seats, back and front, containing a total of six people. This was not so bad as it might seem, for three of these people were young children. In the front seat, a girl sat between Milinqua and Rutgers while in the back, Ford was flanked by a pair of boys.

Ford fidgeted in his seat. He did not like having these children so close to him. And he was bothered. He wanted to ask Milinqua a question. He wanted to ask him why he'd shot the kid. But he knew better. He wasn't going to ask that kind of question. He knew when to keep his mouth shut. Someday, this particular bit of information might be useful, and he intended to hold on to it until that day arrived.

Rutgers, meanwhile, was also curious, but he kept his thoughts deeply buried, for he was possessed of a strong and definite sense of loyalty toward his superior. He knew what Ford was thinking. He always knew what Ford was thinking as clearly as though he had uttered his thoughts aloud, but knowing Ford, knowing how he acted as well as thought, he preferred to ignore him. He expected eventually to inherit the title of local area supervisor, and he knew when he did he would feel gratified by all the years of loyalty he had given his superior, and he only hoped, when the time came, that he could find a man as true and faithful and honest as he had always tried to be.

But he wasn't quite sure why Milinqua had killed the boy. He had an idea. He thought that Milinqua had done it in order to set the other children free. He wasn't sure if that made sense. He didn't know enough about the case. But he did know that Milinqua never acted without good reasons, that he was far from a casual killer, and this was the only reason he could imagine. He carefully studied the girl who sat at his side, gazing intently at her eyes, noting the shallowness of her color and texture, the way she sat, slumped and bent and undisciplined, and the way her facial muscles seemed to hang listlessly from the wide bones beneath her skin. And he listened to the way she babbled, struggling to discern the words that lay beneath the surface of noise. He could not imagine why she was babbling this way, but Ford in the back knew it was because the dead boy's possessive spirit had relinquished control of her soul and was now speedily fleeing the physical confines of her body. Ford was a pragmatic man, who would never have spoken such a thought aloud, or even thought this was consciously, but down deep Ford was also an average man, and such a man

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has little conscious control over the depths of his true thoughts.

—Down in the cabin when he you remember how fully because I barely can remember sensations and feelings sharp as words are like . . . (this was the girl, babbling).

In the beginning, the two boys had also babbled, but they had stopped after a time. Ford wished the girl would stop too. Rutgers thought: *For a child, she's actually quite intelligent. Such clear diction—and powerful words, uncommonly strong words.*

Rutgers knew that the girl and the boys would soon be out of their hands. A delegation had already come from the research installation to discuss the matter with Milinqua, and several men were presently awaiting the arrival of the children. In a few minutes, it would all be over. He didn't know what would happen to the children then, but he hoped none of them would have to die. The children were intelligent and bright. What had happened to them had been a shame. But it hadn't been their fault. And the one who had caused it was dead.

Ford thought: *I wish she'd shut her mouth.* And deep down, he thought: *A soul as long as a snake's belly, long, neverending, around and around, endlessly round.*

Milinqua said:

—The boy was resisting arrest, I believe. Yes, I seem to recall seeing him running toward the woods. That's right. And when he turned at my warning shot, I had no choice but to fire again. I hit him in the head. A bad shot. I had aimed for his knees. After that, I believe he died instantly, or at least very close to it, and that will have to do. And his body will be forwarded at the first available opportunity to the island research facility. No doubt of that.

Reaching inside his coat, Milinqua removed his gun, black and slick and shiny, and lowering the window, he poked the gun outside and fired a single shot.

He said:

—My warning shot.

Then, tucking the gun back in his coat, he grinned at the road ahead.

Rutgers grinned with him.

Rogirsen poked his head from the edge of the woods, his eyes darting furiously like circling hawks. He had never seen this many cars in his life. Where had they all come from? He had never known there were this many people living on the island. He had run and run, taking new paths through the woods, and then crossing cultivated land, where stalks of corn grew taller than a man, small well-tended gardens of corn and some vegetables, sufficient to feed a farmer and his family, and no one had seen him stopping to eat, so he had kept on running. For a time it had seemed as though entire days were passing as he ran, days without nights, and he had kept on running and running and once he had fallen, lying blank and spent, and then it had seemed as if a great weight had been lifted from his back, and when that was done, he had regained his feet and run again and come here.

Now he was trying to convince himself that nothing was wrong, but the act of running had reawakened many newly buried fears, and fear was not

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an easy emotion to subdue.

Waiting, struggling with his fear, he lay low, nearly flat against the earth, supporting the upper portion of his body by the elbows. The earth became for him a reminder of the land beside the creek. It smelled much the same, rich and free. There was a hint of running water in it and the bare whipping noise of passing fish. He knew there was a creek or a stream somewhere near. He would have liked to have gone home again. But he knew that was impossible.

At last, despite the fact that his fear was running as strong as ever, he made himself move away from the earth, and he began to edge toward the highway, crouched low, his fingers nearly touching the ground. Then, standing, he thrust himself full into view, with his eyes clamped shut and his muscles tightly flexed, poised to flee back to the woods. He felt the eyes of the motorists staring at him as they drove past, their huge cars tossing the wind against his face, firm as a hand's slap, and then, when he was sure he couldn't stand another second of it, a car stopped.

At first it didn't stop fully. It paused at the side of the road, and the driver looked at him through the glass.

Rogirsen watched it moving.

Then it stopped. An arm emerged from the window and waved furiously at him.

Rogirsen ran to the car.

The man said:

—Are you looking for a ride? I couldn't tell.

—Yes.

—I saw you standing here and I wondered. Nothing's wrong?

—No. I just want to go.

—Where? Town? I'm going to town. You can ride along.

—Yes, that's where I'm going. Thank you.

The man opened the rear door and Rogirsen slipped into the seat. He felt much better now, safer, muscles loose and relaxed. He was no longer afraid. The car would take care of the running for him. It moved into the traffic stream, cars whizzing past on both sides, getting dark now, the sun hidden by the trees, switching lanes and popping into open spaces. Rogirsen leaned back in the seat and watched. —Is somebody chasing you? You're not in trouble?

—No.

—I didn't mean anything. I was only wondering. You see, back there where I found you, there's nothing there. That's why I wondered what you were doing there.

—I'd gone for a walk. In the woods.

—Oh, I see. I thought that might be it. I didn't mean anything by what I said before. Actually, to tell the truth, I sort of admire anyone who's in trouble these days. It's a good time for a man to be running. I suppose if I were younger than I am, I might be in there running too.

—I see. But I'm not running.

—Have you got a place to stay in town?

—No, I haven't. I was staying with some friends on a farm, but I thought I'd move on.

—Well, I can find you a good place to stay. There's one place I know, it's

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a good place. In fact, it's so good that if you were running, or somebody was chasing you, they would never be able to find you there. That's a good place, isn't it?

—It sounds like it is. Yes.

Far away, passing acres of trees and grass and ferns and vines, colors slowly dying with the end of the day, across and beyond neat cultivated farms, where corn grew higher than a man's head, near the creek, in point of fact, lay two who were like one, part of a man and part of a child, frozen naked and embracing, as still and unmoving as a single grain of sand.

The shadows of impending darkness had begun to encroach upon this silent form. Its feet were buried fully in darkness while the head, turned toward the sky, was shining clear and bright with lingering light. Above stood the tree sweeping straight toward the sun, never seeming to pause till the end of its defiant ascent, branches first sprouting halfway up the trunk, swaying lightly in the breeze, fluttering and nodding briefly. Around the tree, the air was clean and clear and fresh. A squirrel came scampering down the trunk to see, then fled, tail jerking high.

One part (the man part) was thinking:

Too late for tomorrow. What can do? Remembering what never happened to me, seeing with eyes not my own. But there is no me, or I or mine, only an it, only this one. Man coming late into the house with a broken face, cracked as though struck by a chisel. Talking about day's papers and snow whitely blanketing the land all around. Prints drawn deeply in the snow, hands tiny and white speckled with signs of aging. Much smaller hands than yesterday. Everything, always shrinking, old man. Not mine. Mine's been taken away by the other one. Cannot remember me. No more I.

Class dismissed!

The children ran down the steps, leaving the school, though a few dallied behind in order to talk to their teachers. But most were gone, and one voice cracked, "Tallsman's not—" only to be brushed aside by, "They're not here. Not a one of them. They haven't come back."

But curiosity, unlike grief, is not a lasting emotion, so when it came time to eat, all of the children ate a hearty meal, and afterward, some went down to read or study while others played fleetingly across the darkening grounds. Larkin came out and stood watching them.

—He's going to kick off before the month's out.

—No. Not him.

—There's something wrong with his guts, always holding on like he's afraid they'll spill out if he lets go.

—No. He's all right.

—He's ninety-nine and a half years old. What do you think? He can't live forever. He's got to go sometime. Why not now?

—Why should he? Why should you get to see it? My two brothers and sister all came here and they thought they were going to see him go too. He didn't go; he's still here. And he's only eighty-eight or eighty-nine.

—You see him get killed?

—I was on the other side. In a study.

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I'm pretty sure I heard the shots, though.

—They were loud. You couldn't have missed them. Like a cannon going off. I saw the whole thing. They were trying to keep us back from the window but I fought through and peeked. I saw it. Shot him three times in the heart and then got him twice more in the head. Shot him once in the head when he was down. His brains were splattered all over the lawn.

—They were not. I went and saw. A little blood.

—She cleaned it up.

—Well, why didn't she clean the blood too?

—Hey, look—he's coming over.

Larkin approached the children. So this was how they played tag nowadays, the lot of them laughing and talking as cool as icewater. When he was a boy, it hadn't been this way, not when you were playing serious tag. There was something important missing from the game the way these kids played it. Maybe it was the sense of quiet desperation, the wordless despair of the one who was *it,* running until exhausted or torn apart by the taunts of the others who could never be caught. Then he turned and ran for home, screaming.

—I want you children to know everything's going to be all right. I want you to tell your friends who aren't here right now. The problem is over. The incident today, horrible as it surely was, is over now. We must try to forget it. Accept it, if you can, as something which had to happen.

—Why'd they kill him, Larkin?

—I don't know. I wish I did.

—Was he an agent of the enemy?

—That may be. Yes, that may very well be. We'll never know for certain, but we must all keep in mind that these are desparate times. Many things can happen. Almost anything.

—What about Steven and the others? Are they going to have to go into the army?

—I don't think so. I can't imagine why. I'm sure what will happen is that they will be asked some questions. When they answer and tell everything they know, they'll be sent home to their parents.

—They won't be coming back here?

—Not right away. Possibly next year. That will be up to their parents.

—They did that kidnapping. Won't anything happen to them for that?

—Well, he's decided to forgive them. He told me himself.

Inside the main school building, Corlin McGee listened to the boy who was telling her the story of his life. Her appointments were stacked as far back as yesterday morning, and she felt a driving need to put them up-to-date as soon as possible. Which was why she was working now. This late. Not until then, she felt, could she expect to resume the normal daily routine of her life, if that was what she actually wanted to do, and while she wasn't too sure of that, she was sure that this was as good a place as any to begin.

—Back. Back. I want to know about your own life. You as Jonathon Watson. A baby. Remember we talked of this before. Remember.

—Yes, I remember.

—What can you remember?

—I'm back and sleepy. I remember

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that. No, I'm sleeping. That's it—asleep. A hand, crisscrossed with wide intricate lines like a tattoo—no, more like a spider's web, a huge hand like a mountain, the pores open and draining like rivers or streams, trying to hurt, bit—

—No. Go back. That was a dream. Look back at what you see.

Here was her normal daily routine. Jonathon Watson was a young boy, a first year student, and he was just commencing his therapy. How many times had she gone through this? How many children had heard her saying these same dulling, repetitious phrases? Back and back. No, it's a dream. Look for the person. Is this what she truly meant to go on doing? Like Larkin had said, teaching and learning and maybe both. She thought of the nights with Sheridan and the weekends with his friends and the days here in the office, all of this yet to come. And what about Tallsman, off in the woods somewhere, probably asleep under a big rhododendron bush? What about him? And Larkin? What about all of them?

The boy was still talking. He was two years old and he was having a dream.

—Stop. Up. Look at me.

—Passing through a . . .

—No, come up, Jonathon. Air flows through your lungs. Taste it, breathe it. Your name is Jonathon Watson and I am Corlin McGee. You are ten years old and a student at New Morning school. Come and look at me.

—Yes. All right.

The boy glared at her. He had been having a happy time.

—What's the matter? (he asked).

—I'm sorry. I'm tired.

—But we didn't do anything. It was just those same dreams. When are we going to get to the people?

—Later. You have to know yourself, your true self, first. Didn't I tell you that?

—I guess you did. But why do we have to go over and over?

—We don't. In a week. All right? Your regular time.

She assisted him to the door, saw him free to the night, went immediately back to the office. It was time for her to be going. She had made up her mind. I'm leaving here tomorrow, she thought. If I wait a day, I'll never get out. Staring coldly at the walls which had enclosed her for so many years without her ever once having seen how much like the bars of a cage they were, she slammed her fist into her palm. Then she laughed at herself.

But where would she go? Away from this island at least.

But never mind that, she thought.

Leaving the light burning behind, she vacated the office, locking the door. The corridor swept long in front of her and she stood alone for a long moment, gazing down its entire length, deep and straight and white, like the belly of a great whale.

Late in the Pelly Tower, on the fourteenth floor, a hand was furiously scribbling notes on a sheet of white paper, aware that the computer knew this writing well enough to decipher all but the most illegible of squiggles, transforming them into words of firm substance and definite structure.

The hand (which belonged to Antonio Milinqua) was formulating a report, which tentatively read: *Suspect*

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attempting to avoid arrest, and officer left with no alternative but to fire, or else risk escape of suspect. A warning was issued but—

The hand scribbled a few additional words. It was easy for Milinqua to write like this. He enjoyed the chance to tell lies, and each additional word he wrote only added to his general amusement. But he was getting tired of being amused. He needed a break for some serious thinking. He dropped the pen to the desk and let his mind slide open.

(Foot burning with the pain of movement, crawling now across the burning floor, where bare splinters attack the exposed flesh like the glistening barbs of disturbed wasps, and the thing, mere yards away, is coming apart, evenly divisible into its two original components, splitting like the two pasted halves of a rubber toy. Oh hurry, he screams, not now, not me, but the thing is whole and coming toward him, the thing is itself and moving calmly across the flames like a lion stalking its prey, a face as clean and unmarked as any boy's, but it is a boy, he thinks, only a boy of twelve, now looming down, now touching, now flesh slipping inside flesh, clothes unfurling like a cloth tossed to the wind—)

Milinqua dropped a shutter across his thoughts. He wiped his brow. His hands were wet. Perhaps it was a hot night tonight; it wasn't that hot. Returning to the report, he scribbled hurriedly, letting the words of amusement blot the furious thoughts from his mind. He wrote: *Body has been removed from resting place and will be enclosed with this report upon submission to proper headquarters. Doctor Joyce Larkin, founder and owner of school, whose invaluable assistance in this matter—*

Laughing aloud, he felt ashamed. Well, it was better laughing than remembering. The horror of the murder had been nothing compared to the terror of the cabin. He could think about the murder all day, but the cabin was something he would have given his life to have wiped from his memory. He knew transformation was a wonderful thing. He knew that now, but he had not known when it happened. He had been afraid, more truly afraid than at any time in his life. He had never feared death, for death was merely a release from life, while this other thing, this thing crawling toward him on the floor, seemed far worse, a rushing toward life, and it was this that he had feared.

But it was all right now; it was safe now; he was an enlightened being now.

Though he had slain his Messiah. He thought: *I am Judas;* he thought: *But I shall also be Paul.*

He couldn't see where he had any choice. If events had been left in the hands of the boy, the chemically created Messiah, the Christ of the scientific age, the end would never have been in doubt. He knew the kind of men who ruled this world. They were not of the type to allow a being like August to live. What they had created, they would also destroy, and they would have hunted him down, and his converts as well, and exterminated the lot as casually as a cat kills a mouse. No, not like a cat kills a mouse. That was an obsolescent simile. Like a soldier killing another soldier. Hunting each one down, child or man, and

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killing him in the cold, impersonal fashion of a soldier on the battlefield. Milinqua was certain of this, for he would have been one of those assigned to do the hunting and killing.

But then his own conversion had occurred, most ironically, as if Pontius Pilate had been made to believe in the Christian god, but when it was done and too late, he had seen the answer in a way no child, human or otherwise, could have seen it. He was writing this report and it was amusing him to tell lies, but more than that, this report was their salvation. Here was their guarantee of continuing life. All of them, except the one, except August, who was already dead, slain at the hand of the one man who had been able to convince him of his own sincerity in exposing a path to salvation. Come to me and I will ensure that you will not have to run and hide any longer. Isn't this what you want? I am your convert, your disciple, and you may surely put your faith in my hands. And then killed him. Without his ever guessing the truth until it was much too late.

What had he been, after all? The Messiah? Or merely some mock replica of a human being possessing more in common with those low-born creatures who multiply microscopically by absorbing their own brothers and sisters? Wasn't this all that August had been? Was his murder any greater sin than coughing into the palm of one's hand and slaying a million bacteria in the process?

(Squeezing the trigger, fist slamming into his side, imploding deeply, and he bites his lip, screaming so as not to scream, and sees Rutgers seeing and wipes his mind clean so that he will forget, scrubbed and blank and empty, and the echoing screams of the others slice deep, engraved forever in his memory.)

He wrote more, again using the words to smother his thoughts: —*was absolutely essential to the successful termination of the case and whose loyalty to the present establishment, despite his occasionally irregular beliefs, can not be presently doubted.*

Enough. Again, he dropped the pen and his mind slipped open, but this time he steered it away from recollection and turned instead reaching outward to touch those others, so that they would know and he would know that none of them were ever truly alone.

(Melissa: A cold room walls rippling with ice. Sanitary, sparkling instruments, slicing and probing. Man says we only want to find out if— All men saying this but she is under again and unable to avoid this singularly crucial moment of her life, but she is happy this way, satisfied to live and relive this one moment, over and over again. Why can't you talk? You ought to be able to talk. You must tell us. We have to know— But she has nothing to say to them. Her face burns fiercely with nova-like splendor, igniting the ice in this cold room. A pity that none will ever know why.)

(The three: A moving car, open wide to the night. Men whose lips are sealed as tightly as a double-locked door. Uncaring of the when and why and where and who, undemanding men who are only messengers and not concerned beyond that point. They drive,

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carrying these three children, two boys and a girl, and they are not even surprised by the fact that the children, no longer requiring the bare rudiments of personality, seem no more unalike than three identical kittens from the same litter. Chattering furiously among themselves, not quite babbling now, saying only that which is necessary to stifle the horrible truth of the head blowing, exploding, cascading. Dead. *Oh why?* the children inwardly scream. But—why not?)

(Rogirsen: In a most precious place. This old boarding house packed with people four and five to a single room, most of them young and considering him an outlaw like themselves. They speak softly of elsewhere, and Rogirsen thinks of the enemy, yet he is aware that none of them think this way. Elsewhere, a place where a man can truly be free, but he cannot rid himself of his friend's dying self. A girl comes to his room and speaks gently to him, her questions abruptly probing for exposed tissue while her gentleness remains draped above her curiosity. But this is better, he reminds himself, answering. This is the beginning.)

(Lorcas: Who lies now opening, eyes swirling, seeing, done with minds of thinking teaching talking. Black is the sky winkley blinkley stars. And the moon. It must be night, she realizes.)

(Tallsman: Who awakes. And is.)

Him too now, Milinqua thought. Tallsman. Another mature man with whom he must speak, confide, confess, but not until after he has proved his ability to withstand the initial shock of awakening, that he is strong enough to bear the burden of an enlightened self without folding weakly under.

An enlightened self?

Milinqua shook his head. He found it hard to believe that such a term applied. Transformation was merely being allowed to see with the eyes of another, hear with another's ears, feel with his nerves and think with his brain.

But was this enough to turn a man into an enlightened being?

Or merely a human being? Especially human? Truly human? Or simply human?

Milinqua drew the pen and paper toward him and wrote again with furious, hasty scribbles.

Chapter Thirty-Two
Stephanie Millgate Tallsman: When Is This Time Called Now?

They lay like angels sleeping, she thought. But hadn't every woman since the dawn of time thought that? Every mother? Even the heavy-ape-like cave woman rocking on broad stocky legs, staring into the darkened rear of her home, where her children slept, flames casting tall fearful shadows against stone walls, and her mate prowling near the mouth of the cave, thought: *They lay like angels sleeping.* Or had there been any angels then? Maybe just spirits. Children of the fire and rain. The river and the mountain. The sun and the moon. But my children—thought Stephanie—they lay like angels sleeping.

Now there was a chance to rest. The door shut and the feet pattered toward the folds of the chair, which held her like the warmth of spring, and sighing,

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legs freed from the strain of day's time, withdrawn and naked. Would she be seeing him again soon? Or (when) ever? The children slept so soundly now. Well, they were older now. When they were younger, she remembered, neither had slept very well. Stanley was the worst. It was a fine day when he slept five hours without once waking and crying. "Nightmares," the doctor said. Had he gone away with her? Where were they sleeping? Or did they? This morning, she had seen them together. Very young, pretty, not beautiful. A voice which seemed softer than music. Well, she had probably never been angry. Or afraid. Weren't things like that beyond her life? There wasn't any reason for it. She had a good life, sitting all day, just sitting, in that office and going about that place and talking to that old man. Now Gregory. Once he had awakened in the night and cried. But no one had heard him crying. He had fallen and cut his mouth. Gregory had been gone that night. It had been a night a very long time ago. He had been only eighteen, nineteen, twenty months—eleven-thirty now. Ought to sleep for morning. Ought to do that now. How afraid she was for his returning.

There was enough light. Turn this one down soft and let the night have the room, reserving this single spot of light here by the chair. The beauty of night (even indoors) was the fact that it was always darker than day. Oh, he would have gloried in that one. He said Stephanie's proverbs. Stephenie says: Wonder of night is that it is darker than day. He said she said more common things in a more uncommon fashion than anyone-since Lao-tse. Who's he? Look it up. Once she said (having seen the dawn when they were both young, childless, good friends): I never knew it did that. Never knew what? Never knew the sun rose? Well, I knew it did that, but I never knew it did that quite like that. Like what? Like popping over the horizon. Like the way a ball pops silently from the bottom of a tub of water. Stephanie says: The sun pops into the dawning sky, forcefully yet silently, like a ball pops from a tub of water.

Would she see him again? She must proceed on the theory that she would not. What now, then? Work? Or would she be able to convince them to help her? Assistance? Well, no matter. Could they force him to come back to her? There must be a regulation which said. Well, wasn't it desertion, or would they only say for him to support the children? She didn't care about that. There must be something somewhere which said. Maybe he would get bored with her. She was young and soft and pretty. Maybe she would get bored with him.

Just sitting with propped feet, not moving. When the eyes were closed, then everything was black. Another Stephanie. Some men like police or spies here this morning. Some others there. They killed him, but he was a spy. Were they gone now? She knew she could never forgive him everything, but if he were to come back now and offer her another chance, she would forgive him everything.

What would living be worth alone, without him? It sounded strange, just thinking back, because she did not love

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him. So what was that? Didn't she want him and need him? What was love?

Pressing the twelve. She felt the encroaching shadows of the hour. Midnight coming near. Well, come on then, passing, and if you looked, it passed, and if you didn't look, it passed, and if you died, it still passed, going by and bye. If only she could wrap a wet cold washcloth around her brain and never have to think again. How softly wet that crucial cloth upon the thinking brain. Ah, stop it.

Come back to me. I know you're coming, hearing your steps as the car leaves the gates of the school. It's you who's driving down the dirty muddy road.

But that was yesterday. And before.

Can it be? That scraping shuffling sound of feet or knees upon the wood. It has to be. Back—no—door opening—no—oh hello. What can I say? Say nothing, if you wish. Not a single word? No. Oh yes standing crossing saying not a word aren't your clothes torn? There is dirt clinging to your eyes can you see and Greg your eyes are bleeding where have you?

No don't speak. I will not speak. We have nothing to speak when you are bleeding me this way holding. This is fine with me no need to speak to me your eyes are mine. The children both are sleeping. Remember when they used to—no I will not speak. Midnight is emerging and dawn is when they will awaken. I know this is fine. Your arm is lying inside my arm just one arm now. I am not afraid. Should I be afraid? This is funny because I don't know. Lying down now. Oh please I think you should reach way down way deep inside me please. Can you feel me as I've been thinking I can feel you. Yes I think I am one with you. Yes I am sure you are fine with me. Twelve coming past us with a shudder. No I will not speak. I want to think as you are thinking now. Almost. So very near. Seconds now. I can hear it coming pounding near with your. The children are softly crying now. Someone is crying now. That's me who's crying softly now isn't it.

—GORDEN EKLUND

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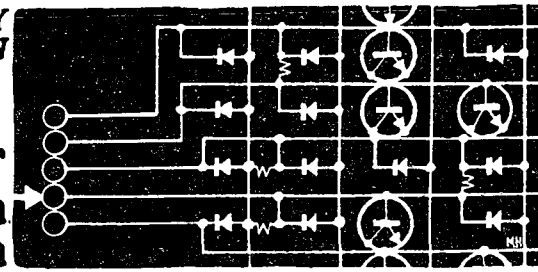
ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

SF in Dimension



The Resurrection of SF—II

THE CHIEF DISTINCTION between mimetic fiction and speculative fantasy is that in mimetic fiction the objective rules the subjective, and in speculative fantasy the subjective rules the objective. The lead essay in an excellent anthology, *The Theory of the Novel,* says that the mimetic novel "records the passage from a state of innocence to a state of experience, from that ignorance which is bliss to a mature recognition of the actual way of the world. In the less loaded terms of Lionel Trilling, the novel deals with a distinction between appearance and reality." This means that mimetic fiction, if it ends well, ends with a marriage, a reconciliation, social, financial or political success. That is, it ends well in objective worldly terms. If it ends badly, it is because a character has attempted to hold on to his subjective standards—and he must be judged mad, or die, or both. On the other hand, in a speculative fantasy, there is no limit to what the central transcendent symbol that represents a subjective meaning can do to symbols of the objective world. The powers, aliens and realms of the World Beyond the Hill can raise the dead, destroy our world, lay waste to anything we think is permanent and stable.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the expansion of objective knowledge in the form of science and exploration had made the conventional well-worn symbols of subjective reality implausible. If subjective reality was to be represented in fiction, new transcendent symbols had to be invented to replace magic, gods, demons, and the places they spring from. Magic, that is, subjective-power-in-general, was replaced early in the 19th century by Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein.* Her new construction of the power of the World Beyond the Hill was as science-beyond-science.

The psychological meaning represented by power is not really very complicated. No matter how many different names are placed upon it, like Superman's array of talents, power is the ability to do or prevent from being done. But power in itself does not make a complete World Beyond the Hill. Not every subjective—that is, psychological—meaning can effectively be represented by a power. Some meanings are better represented by beings or places, but from 1818 until the 1890's, no one did for them what Mary Shelley had done for power. No one found a method for making them plausible in new form. For all those seventy years, one writer of speculative fantasy after another limited himself to following Mary Shelley and represented what he meant by power.

Before transcendent aliens and transcendent realms were possible, two things were necessary. Respectable Victorian literature was tightly bound to the center of the Village—the more respectable, the more tightly bound. And all Victorian

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literature, respectable or not, was emotionally repressed. Both these restraints had to be loosened.

We can sum the emotional repression of both respectable and popular literature in the 19th century by everything we think of as Victorian. The high tradition preached incessantly. It was strait-laced. It followed an emotional party line, admitting only to proper sentiments. And as over-compensation, it indulged itself in sentimentality and violence. Dickens is, for every one of these points, the best worst example.

This emotional dishonesty was exactly reproduced in the dime novel. "The action might be bloody and the heroes rough-hewn, but the books were resolutely virtuous. Erasmus Beadle's regulations forbade 'all things offensive to good taste . . . , subjects or characters that carry an immoral taint . . . , and what cannot be read with satisfaction by every right-minded person, young and old alike.' William Everett, in 1864, found Beadle publications 'without exception unobjectionable morally, whatever fault be found with their literary style and composition. They do not even obscurely pander to vice, or excite the passions.' Their heroes neither drank, smoked, or swore, and limited themselves to expletives like 'Thunderation!' and 'By the horns of Gabriel!' Good and bad men were instantly recognizable; women might be threatened by death, but never by a worse fate; there was absolutely no suggestion of sexuality, though the villain might 'gaze into her white, lovely face with fiendish triumph.' There was blood, bullets, and constant, frantic action, but no more. What parents objected to in the dime novels was not their morality, but their emphasis on sensationalism, violence, and overwrought emotionalism, especially as the type began to degenerate in the seventies and eighties." (Russel Nye in *The Unembarrassed Muse*)

What this repression might be called is the excesses of the didactic. All art inclines to the didactic or to the aesthetic. Art that makes its audience feel is aesthetic. Art that makes its audience think about feeling or feel at second-hand is didactic. If art is to remain honest, it needs both elements. Feeling without thought and thought without feeling are equally false. Balance is necessary.

Individual works of Victorian fiction may have been honest, but Victorian fiction as a whole was a sham. The emotions it encouraged were not the emotions felt by its characters. The emotions it encouraged were the emotions of the properly-instructed spectator. Over and over in discussions of Victorian fiction, whether dime novel, domestic novel, or Dickens, the same words are used: sentimentality, emotionalism, didacticism, moralization, sensationalism.

In the first third of the nineteenth century, the tendency toward the didactic was leavened by a healthy dose of the aesthetic. There was direct emotion in poets like Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats and Byron. There was preachment, but more than preachment, in Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. Even so didactic a writer as Jane Austen gains much of her effect from an interplay between empathetic attachment to her characters and the ironic detachment that allows us to see them whole. If Victorian fiction shows the didactic at its worst, Austen may demonstrate it at its best.

The aesthetic was, of course, never completely lost, but in the middle part of the century, and in particular from 1840 to 1870 it was well-buried. It is no accident that when *The Shaving of Shagpat,* George Meredith's Arabian Nights fantasy, was published in 1856, it was a failure, or that when *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* was published in 1859, it should have been a bomb: "There were

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no reviews of the poem and next to no copies were sold. Its bookseller-publisher, Bernard Quaritch, banished it to the penny box outside his shop . . ."

If Dickens is the Victorian novelist, Tennyson is the Victorian poet. "As a romantic poet he is linked to Keats, but there is a fundamental disparity. Tennyson's romantic poetry acts as an anodyne; Keats's, in maturity, as a tonic; a picturesque ideality engulfs Tennyson; Keats kept a firm hold on actuality and still 'pecked about the gravel' even in his most romantic excursions." "In Browning alone among the greater mid-Victorians is there any frank admission of vital partnership between sensual aptitudes and spiritual health. In the *Fra Lippo Lippi* monologue the errant painter pleads against the censorious prior for the recognition of the dual rights of body and soul, rights stated or tacitly implied in other poems by Browning, who also invests the primary relationship with a degree of human warmth absent from most literature in his heyday. Tennyson wrote love poetry which provides remarkably little communicated emotion; and although it was impossible for him to traverse the Arthurian legends without facing the theme of adultery, he treated the illicit passions with bloodless detachment."

After the time of the U.S. Civil War, both restrictions on Victorian fiction—its intense didacticism, and the requirement that good fiction devote itself to social work—began to break down. Sensuality began to appear in poets like Swinburne and novelists like Thomas Hardy. Romantic fiction that fell somewhere between the high tradition and the low, like *Lorna Doone, Ben Hur, Treasure Island* and *King Solomon's Mines,* all of which might be called in some measure a revival of Scott and Cooper, began to be published once again.

Poe and Verne and Bellamy were as one-sidedly didactic as any of the Victorians. But the plunge after Verne into all the strange places that Verne's characters could only hurry by without visiting—like Greg's voyage to Mars in *Across the Zodiac,* and Bradshaw's journey into the heart of the Earth in *The Goddess of Atvatabar*—is some measure of the growing freedom to be involving, rather than merely uplifting or cautionary. Verne's popularity in itself is part of the general appearance of romantic literature, bridging the gap between the respectable and the disreputable. Verne himself was influenced by the dime novel as well as by Poe.

With the establishment of popular magazines in the 1890's, both the ancestors of the slick magazines and the ancestors of pulp-paper all-fiction magazines, there was a new receptivity to fiction that was aesthetic as well as fiction that was didactic. And both new types of middle-class magazine were receptive to speculative fantasy, providing a wider market for it than had previously existed. This combination of a new broader spectrum of markets and an interest in aesthetic fiction made the development of transcendent aliens and transcendent realms possible.

Transcendent power can be treated either aesthetically or didactically. One can identify with those who use or encounter power, or one can watch them and be instructed. The nineteenth century proved over and over again that all one had to do was watch, and then draw the appropriate indicated conclusion. One watches with Poe. One watches with Verne and his wooden-stick characters. One watches with Bellamy in *Looking Backward* and listens to every lecture on the Industrial Army of the future with all the dispassionate interest of a Chatauqua circuit audience. One even watches with Fitz-

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James O'Brien in "The Diamond Lens" as the drop of water evaporates and beautiful Animula shirlvels and dies, but one doesn't so much as blink when the narrator is overcome by the pathos of the moment and faints dead away. Instead, one draws the appropriate conclusion—don't mess with microscopes, and especially don't commit murder to obtain one, for if you do, you may find yourself muttering, "They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken."

Transcendent power, however mysterious its ultimate sources—and even mundane power like the ability to sing or shoot pin-ball is a trifle mysterious—is unmysterious in its meaning. The meaning of power, as we have said, is always the same for anyone who encounters it. It is the ability to do or prevent from being done, and either you have it or you don't. Power is out front. A reader does not need the emotions of a character or the reflections of a narrator to explain the meaning of power.

Transcendent aliens and transcendent realms are another matter. They do not wear their meaning on their face. In fact, their transcendence depends on their maintaining a mysterious unfathomable depth. Hence, a reader cannot judge them for himself. They cannot be used didactically. A reader must find their meaning in the reaction of a character or a narrator. The aliens and realms of the World Beyond the Hill are aesthetic stuff. The didactic nineteenth century could neither have invented them nor put them to use.

It was H. G. Wells, a writer who is easily the superior in ambition, talent and imagination of any who wrote speculative fantasy before him during the nineteenth century, who did for the creatures and countries of the World Beyond the Hill what Mary Shelley had done for the vital forces. He made them plausible. He made them useful symbols for psychological meanings once more.

Jules Verne once said of Wells: "I do not see the possibility of comparison between his work and mine. We do not proceed in the same manner. It occurs to me that his stories do not repose on a very scientific basis. No, there is no rapport between his work and mine. I make use of physics. He invents. I go to the moon in a cannon-ball discharged from a cannon. Here there is no invention. He goes to Mars [sic] in an air-ship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation. *Ca, c'est tres joli,* but show me this metal. Let him produce it."

What Verne did not realize is that his aluminum cannonball in *From the Earth to the Moon* is precisely equivalent to Wells's anti-gravity metal, Cavorite, in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901). Both are equally imaginary powers of travel. Both are equally science-beyond-science, even though Verne chooses to render his power plausible by piling a mountain of relevant and irrevelant facts around it, while Wells presents an analogy, a fact or two, and then has his narrator regret his failure to keep notes. If Verne were to be judged by his own standard, he would be wronger than Wells. Verne's aluminum cannonball is no longer plausible. It has been overtaken by science and we know now that it would have made jam of his astronauts: it is the wrong metal and the wrong method. On the other hand, Cavorite is as plausible, if as imaginary, today as it ever was.

The true difference between Verne and Wells is not in their means of travel. The difference is that Verne circled the Moon and returned to Earth without ruffling the feathers of his passengers, while Wells is only interested in Cavorite as a device for reaching the Moon and discovering mystery. Cavor says, " 'We are out of Mother Earth's leading-strings now,' "

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and the narrator says of the Moon, " 'It's like the landscape of a dream.' " And so they are, and so it is. Verne's travelers are tourists out to score didactic points for our benefit, but Wells's voyagers are involved with the unknown, and through their involvement, they involve us.

What Wells did that brought the sleeping symbols of transcendent aliens and transcendent realms awake from their trance was to dramatize them. It is only by dramatization that their transcendence—their ability to represent subjective meanings fully, their ability to be deeper than a well—can be maintained.

Powers are a different matter. It is not necessary to dramatize powers, but only to concretize them—that is, to give them a name and definition—as one would any ordinary non-transcendent symbol. Power is disembodied. It is limitless in extent and duration. It is. To be transcendent, power merely has to be limitless in potency, and being defined as beyond knowledge is sufficient to give power all the potency it needs. Call power galvanism-plus, or hypnotism-plus, or Cavorite, or a super-cannon. Describe it by analogy. That is enough. Since all power is disembodied and naturally mysterious—call it "spirit," if you will—it can retain its transcendence in spite of familiar treatment.

Realms, however—places and things—are not spirit. They are pure body—*thunk*. If realms are to be transcendent, if they are to be of the World Beyond the Hill, they cannot be closely described. They must keep their secrets. It is the mysterious transcendent nature of Shangri-La that withers at the first touch of reality. Direct concretization—that is, exact definition—is too specific. However, dramatization is not.

Dramatization is the communication of a symbol, not by direct description, but by association with other mysteries that can be described. The implication is that the transcendent symbol is, at the least, the sum of their mystery. The Moon in *The First Men in the Moon* is a transcendent realm because of its unearthly plants, its monstrously disgusting moon-calves, and its insect-like intelligent Selenites. The Moon gains plausibility from their concreteness at the same time that it gains mystery from their strangeness. This is a subtle method, but it works splendidly, as Wells discovered. Or rather, rediscovered, since deep dark forests have been made transcendent by the mysteries within their depths since speculative fantasy began.

Aliens are an intermediate case between powers and realms. They are both body and spirit. We can know others intimately and still be surprised by their unsuspected depths. Aliens can be concretized. It is our way of getting to know them better. But they cannot be merely concretized. If they are, we will find them as overly-familiar as the unneurotic humans that an Edward Bellamy narrator discovered as the population of Mars in the short story "The Blindman's World" (1886). They must be dramatized in some way to remind us of their infinitude. The invisible monster in Fitz-James O'Brien's "What Was It? A Mystery" (1859) may be a genuine transcendent alien, or may not. He is concretized, described quite plausibly as an insidious attacker who drops from the vicinity of the ceiling one night as the narrator lies awake after hitting the opium pipe too hard and attempts to choke the narrator to death. But is he just a vehicle for concretized invisibility, or is he himself transcendent? It depends on the other powers he may have—and he refuses to discuss the matter. The title of the story poses the question, but does not answer it. With Wells, there is no question. His Martians in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) are both con-

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crete and dramatic, both plausibly described and associated with a variety of deadly powers and the ability to travel through space from Mars, the planet of the War God. They are fully-realized transcendent aliens.

The young Wells reintegrated speculative fantasy. He was a master both of concretization and dramatization. He invented analogies that are still in effective use today. He wrote well enough to satisfy the literary-minded and vividly enough to win a popular following. He combined didactic philosophy—ideas—with aesthetic expression—pure emotion. Over a period of nearly fifteen years after 1890, first (and last) in short stories, and in at least five remarkable novels, he established the new canons of speculative fantasy.

Wells's forte was aliens. He was fascinated by evolution—one of his teachers was Thomas Huxley—and in a world that identified evolution with progress, he was even more fascinated by devolution. Through the device of aliens, Wells was able to express the ambiguities of his twin fascination.

Wells spent the early 1890's in obscurity, writing essays on the subject of evolution and stories about giant bats and vampiric orchids. Beginning in 1888 with *The Chronic Argonauts,* which he later attempted to suppress, Wells produced one version after another of *The Time Machine,* his first novel. The final version appeared in 1895 and made a striking impression. The machine itself is a magnificent new power, capable of taking a protagonist to any era of Earth's history. It is far superior as a concretization to the dreams or trances or hypnotic slumbers or racial memories that had carried earlier time travelers on their journeys. The future—not a mere jump to the year 2000, but great leaps, 800,000 to 30,000,000 years from now—becomes in Wells's hands a magnificent new realm, almost totally divorced from anything in the present, and capable of containing any wonder. But the most striking symbols of the story are the alien inhabitants of the future.

The Eloi and the Morlocks are true aliens of a sort not produced in speculative fantasy since the death of the old symbols of the World Beyond the Hill. J.R.R. Tolkien says of them, "Eloi and Morlocks live far away in an abyss of time so deep as to work an enchantment on them; and if they are descended from ourselves, it may be remembered that an ancient English thinker once derived the *ylfe,* the very elves, through Cain from Adam." Tolkien is right in his appreciation of their true alienness, but their descent from ourselves is no accidental happenstance. It is the deliberate projection of Wells's anxiety about the security of man's grasp on his humanity.

In the novels that succeeded *The Time Machine,* Wells further explored symbols of alienness. *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) is about a mad scientist who creates an island population of beast men, manlike beings formed from animals, who, like the Morlocks, caricature the brutish aspects of humanity. *The Invisible Man* (1897) is a more effective presentation of the materials of O'Brien's "What Was It? A Mystery." The invisible man is a human, but he is entirely alienated from humanity by his power of invisibility. He does not *become* invisible. He is invisible when the story begins. And like a werewolf he assumes his natural form only in death: "When at last the crowd made way for Kemp to stand erect, there lay, naked and pitiful on the ground, the bruised and broken body of a young man about thirty. His hair and beard were white—not grey with age but white with the whiteness of albinism, and his eyes were like garnets. His hands were

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clenched, his eyes wide open, and his expression was one of anger and dismay. 'Cover his face!' said a man. 'For Gawd's sake, cover that face!" Here is power (and difference) used for aesthetic purpose.

But after the submen of *The Time Machine,* Wells's most significant aliens were the extraterrestrials of *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon.* Previous extraterrestrials—like Voltaire's native of Sirius eight miles high in *Micromégas* (1752) or Bellamy's Martians—are human beings in clever plastic disguise. They are often described in directly human terms, touched though they might be by a single super-power. Wells went far beyond this. His extraterrestrials are clearly human in no way.

In both these cases, Wells's aliens are inflated versions of some feared earthly beast that he had already used in a short story. The Martians of *The War of the Worlds* resemble the man-eating octopodes of "The Sea Raiders" and the Selenites of *The First Men in the Moon* recall the intelligent ants of "The Empire of the Ants." But the larger versions, originating at a distance from the Village and with greater powers at their command, are more effective symbols.

After 1900, the direction of Wells's career altered significantly and he largely left speculative fantasy behind. He had always had a didactic strain—he had begun in adult life as a teacher of science in a private school—but in the early novels it was well-balanced with an aesthetic element. His stories were presented as entertainments. The speculative fantasies that he wrote after the turn of the century were socialist utopias like *A Modern Utopia* (1905) in which, increasingly, entertainment was abandoned in favor of social exhortation. He began to write social tracts like *The Discovery of the Future* (1902) and *Mankind in the Making* (1903), and turned to writing contemporary novels of society like *Kipps* (1905) and *Tono-Bungay* (1909) which were better received than his utopian fantasies and at the time were held to show generally "a great advance in artistic power."

In short, Wells set himself up as a universal guru. And though he wrote occasional speculative fantasies thereafter, they were not well-received. As Wells himself said in 1934 in the preface to his *Seven Famous Novels,* "It becomes a bore doing imaginative books that do not touch imaginations, and at length one stops even planning them. I think I am better employed now nearer reality, trying to make a working analysis of our deepening social perplexities in such labours as *The Work, Wealth and Happiness of Mankind* and *After Democracy.*"

In light of our belief that speculative fantasy is subjective in meaning and mimetic fiction is objective, it is possible to make sense of the dramatic shift in Wells's career. Wells was the son of a gardener (and professional cricket-player) and a housemaid, who rose in a class-conscious society on the strength of his intelligence alone. He spoke with a Cockney accent. His dramatic presentation of the subject of alienation by means of transcendent imaginative symbols can be read as a reflection of the insecurity of a man newly-arrived in a higher station, wondering whether his evolution can be counted on or whether he will shortly devolve again, and wondering too about the gap his intelligence has made between himself and all those he has grown up and worked with. Speculative fantasy allowed him to say these things as purely as they can be said. With success—and significantly, with success based on the expression of these particular emotions—Wells could afford to express the complexities of his situation in objective social terms within mimetic fic-

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tions. This is not a problematical reading. The social expression of the problems of rising in class is the explicit material of Wells's first success as a mimetic novelist, the partly-autobiographical *Kipps*. With emotional security, Wells could turn to doing for others what he had done for himself—educate them. For this good work, speculative fantasy was no longer his natural medium, as he discovered when he attempted to employ it, and he largely abandoned it in favor of social fiction like *Anne Veronica* (1909) and *The History of Mr. Polly* (1910), then abandoned social fiction in favor of direct education in massive works like *The Outline of History* (1920), and eventually, when he discovered the futility of attempting to make the world over in his own image, abandoned hope in favor of a final tirade, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1945), after which he died.

After Wells, speculative fantasy continued to develop, but along very different lines in England and America. In England, it followed Wells into literary respectability—but its forms were limited, particularly so after World War I.

The two most notable writers of the new speculative fantasy in England after Wells and before the war were M.P. Shiel and Arthur Conan Doyle. Doyle wrote a series of stories—the best known of which is the first, the novel *The Lost World* (1912)—about a brilliant scientist, Professor Challenger. In *The Lost World,* Challenger discovers a variety of prehistoric creatures living on a plateau in South America. The second Challenger novel, *The Poison Belt* (1913), and Shiel's best-known novel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901), are disaster stories in the spirit of *The War of the Worlds* but without the alien element. Through the nineteenth century, the disaster story, prompted perhaps by then-current theories of geological catastrophism, was a presistent minor mode. Mary Shelley wrote a novel, *The Last Man* (1826), about a world plague, and Edgar Allan Poe wrote a short story, "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion" (1839), in which a comet alters the Earth's atmosphere, destroying all life. But the spirit of stories like Doyle's and Shiel's is so closely identified with the early pessimistic Wells that catastrophe stories tend to be described as Wellsian. It is a type of story particularly loved by the British. One modern British science fiction writer after another—Wyndham, Christopher, Ballard—has taken his turn at destroying the world.

But the respectable English practice of speculative fantasy after World War I largely confined itself to didactic answers to Wells's didactic socialist utopias. Dystopic novels like Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), L.P. Hartley's *Facial Justice* (1960), and even Evgeny Zamiatin's *We* (1924), the work of a Russian one-time resident of England that was first published in English translation, are answers to the later Wells couched largely in terms Wells himself set forth in his early dystopia, "A Story of the Days to Come" (1897).

In America, as in England, the development of speculative fantasy continued in terms of occasional stories, but on a far broader basis, if at a less respectable literary level. The pulp magazines, which had not yet become specialized, as they would later, provided a regular market for speculative fantasy, generally called "scientific romances" or "different stories." The magazine which published the most speculative fantasy, and the most original and significant work of the period, was the Frank A. Munsey magazine, *All-Story,* edited by Robert H. Davis. The speculative fantasy that was published in the pulp magazines was both aesthetic and didactic—and more aes-

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thetic than didactic. As in England, there were stories of transcendent power, but there were also stories of transcendent aliens, and, more and more, stories of transcendent realms.

It was realms that had suffered most greatly in the assault of the Village on the World Beyond the Hill. It was realms that were eliminated by the mapping expeditions of Captain Cook, one realm after another denied the right to exist in a sunlit world. And after the time of silence during which the World Beyond the Hill could seem a dead issue to enlightened practical men—when new powers erupting in the very heart of the Village and new aliens hovering at the edges of the known to harry our easy comfort proved the World Beyond the Hill very much alive—this Earth still allowed no transcendent realms.

Realms do not invade the Village. Realms must be sought by adventurous men, or by innocents, or by seekers of truths unknown in the Village. But always realms must be ventured to.

For a realm to be transcendent, it must contain at least two different symbols which encountered alone in the Village would be transcendent, like Wells's mooncalves and Selenites. But dramatization of a realm by means of these lesser transcendent symbols is, while necessary, not sufficient to bring it to life in our minds. For additional definition, for plausibility, and for emotional color, realms must be associated with non-transcendent symbols. Their specificity then serves in place of direct description of the realm itself. The technique is, if you will, like letting the exact description of a picture on the wall of a house, or of an inhabitant of a house, substitute for a description of the house.

This technique of description by association applies equally well to aliens and powers, of course. The magnicity of Atvatabar can be described directly, but it takes on added definition from its underground home. The difference is that description by association adds to the direct concretization of aliens and powers, but it is a necessary substitute for the direct concretization of realms. We can't be allowed to see the forest whole or learn the source of its mysteries if the forest is to remain transcendent. Instead of the forest, we are shown trees.

Perhaps the most important of the symbols with which a transcendent realm may be associated is locale. Locale is not absolutely essential—Never-never Land survives without a specific location—but for the sake of plausibility it is good to have a blank area on the map to which one can point and say, "Here there be super-tygers and other wonders." It was plausibility, more than anything else, that was destroyed by Captain Cook. He made the earthly locales he visited too concrete to sustain magical forests.

It was Wells who established the two infinitely plausible and unlimited locales that have been the most frequently employed as the settings for transcendent realms in modern science fiction—time and space. In *The Time Machine,* Wells turned the future from a known quantity, the familiar present made up to look older, into a place of infinite mystery. In *The First Men in the Moon,* he did the same for the nearest and best known body in space, and hence by further application provided for the possibility of as many transcendent realms as there are planets, or as there are stars in the universe.

Once Wells had demonstrated the technique of dramatization, locale was no longer a problem, though Wells's technique was not as immediately applied to realms as it was to aliens. From that point, it was possible to write of transcendent realms other than vague Never-never Lands. The removed places that had been

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used as settings for stories of single powers—the future, Mars, the center of the Earth, or other dimensions as in *Flatland*—were available as locales for dramatized transcendent realms.

Providing emotional coloration was a greater problem. The taste of the readers of the pulp magazines was for romantic adventure. They wanted bright coloration—exotic or barbarian derring-do, free of Victorian conventions and Victorian inhibitions—both in transcendent realms and in the simpler removed places associated with powers. These settings were not naturally romantic, however. They were emotionally neutral, characterless, or, at best, they reflected the emotions that Wells had projected upon them: devolutionary melancholy or utopian even-tempered good cheer.

There was one exception, however, a locale both vague enough to serve as the setting of alien realms and highly colored. This locale was prehistory. The more-or-less surmisable aspects of prehistory provided the material for stories like Wells's "A Story of the Stone Age" (1897), Jack London's *Before Adam* (1906), and a number of others in which White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Cro-Magnons discover fire and the bow, and battle bestial Neanderthals, or saber-toothed tigers, or dinosaurs. But, rather better, the unknown areas of prehistory provided the possibility for animating the ruins of Atlantis that Captain Nemo had shown to M. Arronax in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.* During the 1880's, Atlantis had been characterized by Ignatius Donnelly as the source of all civilization, the Garden of Eden, and the home of the scientifically-advanced men and women who have been remembered as the gods and goddesses of legend—just as in the recent Donovan song—and by Madame Helena Blavatsky as the source of occult knowledge. This was color enough for anyone, and this material was swallowed whole and incorporated into fiction. Between 1896 and 1905, there were at least sixteen novels that brought Atlantis, live and kicking, on-stage.

This romantic stuff was so successful that it was brought into the present, where it worked as well as it had in the past. In some cases, only a single apeman or dinosaur or Atlantean survived into our time, but in others, Atlantis itself, preserved under glass, might rise to the surface again to disturb the political balance of power, or great colonies of apemen and dinosaurs might be discovered in Africa or in South America, as in Doyle's *The Lost World.*

In the present, prehistoric survivals were married to the premise of Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race,* H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines,* and Bradshaw's *The Goddess of Atvatabar,* that an entire people or nation could be tucked away in an underground cavern, or a jungle, or an inaccessible valley like Shangri-La. The result of the marriage was that colorful complex of associated symbols, the lost race. And from the present, this lost race complex was exported to the future and to other planets, bringing romance into drab locales to lend transcendent realms a definite and desirable emotional character.

Most of the aesthetic speculative fantasy novels published in *All-Story* or the other Munsey pulps show strong traces of the lost race complex. In George Allan England's *Darkness and Dawn* (1914), Western civilization has suffered disaster, leaving the future Earth colorfully barbaric and our descendants a lost race. Austin Hall and Homer Eon Vlint's *The Blind Spot* (1921) presents another universe linked to our world that is the native home of romantic and mystical figures like "The Rhamda Avec," who carry about their turbans the aura of the occult.

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Ray Cummings' "The Girl in the Golden Atom" (1919) is a story that goes Fitz-James O'Brien's "The Diamond Lens" one better. Cummings' hero—"The Chemist"—succeeds in shrinking himself, the better to pursue his own Animula—and discovers a lost race there in an atom of his mother's wedding ring. They even speak a language that "resembled English quite closely."

Not all of these stories are of transcendent realms. In most cases, they are not, but are merely exotic backgrounds against which powers may effectively be displayed. A clue may be that a lost race speaks English. Speaking English improves the ease of communication, but at the same time it sabotages mystery.

However, at least two authors, Edgar Rice Burroughs and A. Merritt, the masters of the period, did write of truly transcendent realms. Neither of these two very different writers was a Wells, but they were the most able of those who appeared in the general pulp magazines before speculative fantasy was gathered into specialist magazines.

Burroughs appeared at the beginning of the essay of the pulps into romantic speculative fantasy, so unsure of himself and the reaction to his work that he signed his first story, "Under the Moons of Mars" (*All-Story*, 1912), "Normal Bean" to indicate that his mind was in one piece, whatever readers might think. Ah, but the readers loved the story, and loved *Tarzan*, which followed under Burroughs' own name, even more. And Burroughs put his own name on all the stories that followed, many, though not all, speculative fantasy.

Burroughs was not primarily a stylist, but he was a natural story-teller, an able, vigorous, inventive melodramatist. Like Robert Heinelin nearly thirty years later, who two years after his first story was published was Guest of Honor at the Third World Science Fiction Convention, Burroughs stood out clearly among his contemporaries, even as a beginner. And like the early H.G. Wells, his name became identified with a type of speculative fantasy: clean, simple, optimistic, violent, romantic outdoor adventure in an exotic world.

Burroughs used the material that came most easily to hand to make his stories—perhaps one significant indication of his limitations as a writer—and he used the lost race complex over and over again. In his Tarzan stories, he filled Africa with lost cities filled with degenerate Atlanteans, Roman Legionaries, and ant-men. In his Pellucidar series, he filled the center of the Earth with barbarians, man-apes, living fossils, and intelligent parthenogenetic telepathic winged reptiles. And in his Martian stories, he wrote of an ancient planet, resources failing, population diminishing, where the scientific and the barbaric play together with ray and sword.

Burroughs was a dramatizer by the nature of his conceptions, and not by expression. He was a transitional writer who followed Victorian models. His language was incredibly didactic, especially in his early work, and his most apparent talent was for concrete expression—telling exactly who and what things are. But strangely, the cumulative effect of his stories is not didactic, but clearly aesthetic.

His heroes are not wooden sticks like Verne's, dispassionately observing and sentimentalizing without ever engaging with life. They are cold-blooded stoical supermen, like John Carter who proved himself as a soldier-of-fortune on five continents before astral projection took him to Mars. These men cannot afford emotion lest it trip them up in the pursuit of their business, but neither do they have the brains to be true thinkers. They

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are men of action who treat action like a business:

" 'This gentleman was hit once at least,' he said. 'Possibly thrice.' 'Twice,' said Tarzan. 'Once in the left shoulder and again in the left side—both flesh wounds, I think' " (Yes, it is Tarzan who is wounded.)

The sound is very like Verne, but the conception is worlds apart, and so is the effect. If one can believe in such men, and the boys who are Burroughs' first audience can, the effect is admirable and appropriate restraint, rather than estrangement. If Tarzan says it doesn't hurt, it doesn't hurt, and who would doubt him? After all, he was raised by an ape in the jungle and if he were inclined to cry about flesh wounds, he would never have survived. Apes are notoriously stoical.

This impression of Burroughs' covert aestheticism is confirmed by Burroughs' worlds, which are transcendent. Between Burroughs' penchant for stories in series—a mark, perhaps, of his refusal to dwell overlong in thought (he took for most of his many novels not much more than a month)—and the prodigality of concrete marvels he improvised to keep his limited settings fresh, his realms become transcendent in spite of the didactically presented description. In cumulation—like the cumulation of barbarian invasions that have come trotting patiently westward out of the mysterious vortex that is central Asia—this endless gush of marvels makes Burroughs' Mars a bottomless well of new magics that can never be fully known. It is this cumulation that brings men back to Burroughs when they are no longer boys and stoical supermen have come to seem, if not unbelievable, at least painfully limited. Mars is the transcendent reflection of Burroughs' mind that expresses indirectly the emotion that Burroughs could not express directly in words.

If one would know Burroughs, one must attempt to explore his worlds and savor their mystery. And still, there is more to Mars than Burroughs ever revealed in eleven books—because there is more to Burroughs than Mars can ever reveal.

A. Merritt is a quite different writer. If Burroughs is a transitional writer, a later Victorian who painfully overcame the handicap of Victorian expression, Merritt is the transition completed. Merritt is a natural dramatizer whose major defect is an excess of raw aesthesis, untempered by thought. Merritt was incapable of describing a garbage can in pallid prose, untouched by color.

Merritt's first story of note, "The Moon Pool" (1918), features an alien as a transcendent symbol—the dread Dweller in the Moon Pool which appears when the Moon is full, tinkling uncannily and glowing in seven different colors, and carries people off to an unknown doom. But in the novel version of the story (1919), and in the most popular and influential of the novels that followed, *The Ship of Ishtar* (1924) and *Dwellers in the Mirage* (1932), Merritt went straight to his strongest material, the trancendent realm. The world of the Moon Pool is an underground cavern which includes not only the Dweller, but also strange beasts, not-quite-human humans, a variety of elements then unknown on Earth which had been detected by spectroscopy (so Merritt says) on the Moon and Sun, strange forms of radioactivity, and luminescent cliffs which provide illumination.

Merritt's locales are more tightly bound to Earth than Burroughs' are. They tend to be lost cities or hidden valleys, cut to a smaller space than Pellucidar or Mars.

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But even on first acquaintance they are clearly transcendent.

Merritt's fiction displays the last fevered glory of the lost race complex. After the high point of Merritt, and its one culminating legitimate expression in Hilton's *Lost Horizons* (1933), the lost race complex as a useful set of associated symbols was replaced by others that were more flexible. It had served the useful purpose of providing an initial characterization for new removed realms, but its limitations were apparent.

The limitations of Burroughs and Merritt as writers are apparent, too. Their work is not serious. It is repetitive, narrow and sometimes silly. It is light entertainment, in no sense the match of the masterpieces of speculative fantasy of earlier days. In no sense the match of the very best of the mimetic writing of their own day. But, amazingly, it has survived, this cheap popular trash. It does continue to move readers.

The stories of Burroughs and Merritt live, where the work of popular or even highly regarded authors of their day—Robert W. Chambers, Jack London, Booth Tarkington, Edith Wharton, Upton Sinclair, Willa Cather, and even Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson—is dying or dead. People read and remember fondly the mimetic fiction of their youth, but for later generations one-time mimetic "classics" are totally without interest. Who today would read *The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner* and *The Rise of Silas Lapham* who wasn't required to do so? Can one imagine a revival of Willa Cather to match the surge of interest in Edgar Rice Burroughs that occurred when his books were finally discovered to be in public domain and were placed in paperback in the early 1960's?

It may seem audacious to say, but "Under the Moons of Mars" (*A Princess of Mars*) is more important than *Ethan Frome* in the history of world literature. *The Moon Pool* is more important than *Winesburg, Ohio* or *An American Tragedy* or *Babbitt,* just as *The War of the Worlds* is more important than *Kipps.* They have already meant more to more people, they mean more today, and as time passes they will continue to mean more. And that is a fact that must be taken into account by anyone who wishes to judge literature as a whole. Technique and close observation of the objective world are not the sole criteria of literary merit. There are merely the chief criteria of mimetic fiction.

By 1920, the new speculative fantasy did not yet have a firm sense of itself. It was only newly-reborn. But all of its necessary symbols—powers, aliens, and realms—were together again and had been turned to good purpose. Speculative fantasy was alive!

It only remained for someone to provide a place where all the new symbols could be expressed, interconnected and developed, a hothouse for the growth of speculative fantasy in its new forms. The man who provided that place was Hugo Gernsback in a magazine called AMAZING STORIES. And Gernsback did not know what he was doing.

—ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

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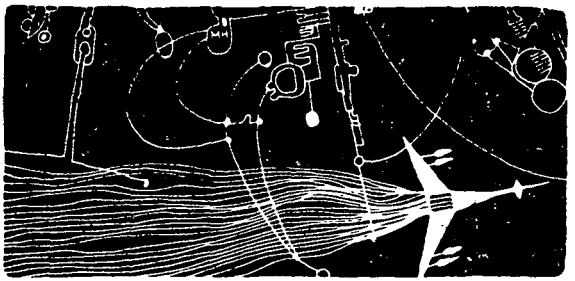

O'Neil & Adams: GREEN LANTERN & GREEN ARROW #1. Paperback Library #64-729, 1972. 180 unnumbered pages; 75¢. Introduction by Samuel R. Delany.

In reviewing Gil Kane's *Blackmark* in our August, 1971 issue, I remarked at some length about the efforts made to introduce mass-marketed adult-quality comics—and concluded that although Kane was definitely aiming in that direction, he had been less than completely successful. I faulted both his story line (bad pulp writing, hoary clichés) and the pacing and layout of his graphics (the division of pictures and blocks of text seemed to create a static effect which obviated much of the vitality of the comics medium). Recently Denny O'Neil—whose stories have appeared here (this issue, in fact) and in *F&SF*—sent me a review copy of the new *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* paperback with the remark that Neal Adams' new layouts for the book should meet most of my earlier criticisms. I don't intend to turn this column into a comics review column, but this issue I shall deal with Denny's book and next issue—along with our publication of the new Conan novella—I will review the *Conan* comics published by Marvel. If comics aren't normally one of your interests, I suggest you suspend your disbelief in them for the moment.

Unlike Kane's *Blackmark*, this book was not created originally for the paperback market. It is a cobbling together of the first "revived" *Green Lantern* story (from 1959) and the two recent stories (from issues 76 and 77, published in 1970). The first story, which occupies only the first six pages, serves to set the stage for the remaining two, each of which occupied a complete issue of a 15¢ comic magazine originally. Despite Chip Delany's statement to the contrary ("Reprinting comics in book form is an infrequent occurrence at the best of times, usually reserved for nostalgia classics or continental imports."), this has not been an uncommon practice. In 1965 and 1966 comic magazine reprints in paperback form became something of a fad. Signet issued Superman and Batman reprints, Lancer did a slew of Marvel comics reprints (Spiderman, Fantastic Four, et al), and other houses put out yet more books of comics reprints in an attempt to jump upon an apparent bandwagon. At that time the Marvel

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group was riding a crest of collegiate popularity and Batman was the hottest camp item on the tube.

Superheroes lasted for ten years, the second time around—from about 1960 to 1970—as the dominating trend in comics publishing. Marvel had ushered in the revival by doing something at that time unique: their customed do-gooders were given characters of sufficient complexity that it was no longer impossible to identify them without their uniforms on. And the stories took on aspects of the never-ending serials which dominate daytime television. Marvel's superheroes faced human problems—such as how to come up with the rent (Spiderman originally went after reward money and ended up selling photos of himself in action to the local newspaper)—as well as a continually evolving storyline in which heroes and heroines romanced, wed, and even had babies.

However, during this "Marvel Age of Comics," the slumbering giant of the comics industry, the National Comics Group, publisher of Superman, Batman, et al, dozed on. Old costumed heroes were revived, did silly things, and were put back out to pasture. Batman enjoyed a brief sales success during the advent of the TV show, but soon slumped again to pre-TV levels. National's heroes were still trapped somewhere south of 1948, each story pretty much like the next and none of them of the slightest memorability.

Enter Denny O'Neil. At one time a minor Marvel scriptwriter, and then the house hack for Charleton, Denny followed Charleton editor Dick Giordano to National, where he proceeded to jazz up a number of the National superhero mags. The stories followed the same silly formulas—alien menaces from Outer Space predominated—but the quality of the prose was improved, made more idiosyncratic, more immediate. (At that time National comics were for the most part edited and written by old men—men who had come to that company in the late thirties and early forties and gathered cobwebs gracefully over the years. In 1968 a National house ad for several of its titles, in an attempt to be up to date and "with it," blurbed the comics as "Hep!"—a word which showed as well as any how *au currant* they were over there. Denny was probably one of the first National staffers who knew the word was no longer in current usage.)

In 1970, after letting him prove himself to be one of their best scriptwriters, National allowed Denny to try pulling one of their chestnuts out of the fire. The magazine was *Green Lantern,* and saleswise it was dead. The decade was over, superheroes were dying on the vine, and rumors were rife in the industry that so were comics. All comics.

Denny got together with an artist named Neal Adams. Adams had done syndicated strips, work for the black & white horror comics (*Creepy,* etc.), and considerable work for both Marvel and National. He was perhaps best-known for his *Deadman,* a rather sophisticated (too sophisticated; it never caught on with the public) series about a ghost seeking his mysterious murderer. He is one of the five top artists in the comics field.

Together, O'Neil and Adams sat

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down to work over *Green Lantern*. The magazine was a dead duck and the publishers had nothing to lose in giving them their heads with it—if they were less than a commercial success, nothing was lost. If they could bring sales up out of the red, why then they'd be heroes.

The first issue on which they collaborated was #76—the second story in this book. It deservedly shook up a lot of comics readers and it swept the annual awards of the newly-formed American Academy of Comic Book Arts, which voted it the best story of the year, Adams the best artist and O'Neil the best writer.

It wasn't really *that* good (although 1970 wasn't a very good year, either), and the sales did not magically shoot up to new heights, but the magazine was saved—for the time being—and is still hanging in there, two years later. That much was a victory.

Delany, in an introduction which does him little credit, quotes *Green Lantern's* editor Julius Schwartz as saying: "The commercial comic book has developed more in the past year and a half than it has in the fifteen years preceding." This is demonstrably false, but typical of the attitude at National in which only National's comics are seen as the center of the comics industry universe. In point of fact, comics magazines reached their high point more than twenty years ago—from which National, as the prime mover behind the repressive and infantile Comics Code Authority, smashed the field's standards flat. The industry as a whole was moldering until the Marvel group introduced its new dimension to the superhero—and it took National ten years and the threat of extinction to catch up. Presently "the commercial comic book" industry is witnessing a battle between the two major survivors—National and Marvel—from which each expects to be the only one to emerge. This, despite the strong suspicion of most within the industry that neither can survive long without the other—market penetration is already diminishing disastrously.

National thinks, with acute hindsight, that at last it has what it needs to freshen up its line: Relevance. Operating under the remarkable illusion that it created this commodity and introduced it to the field in the form of the new *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* comics, National is now promoting its discovery with feverish enthusiam. The result is this book, published by National's captive paperback house, Paperback Library. (Both are owned by Kinney Systems, Inc., and National distributes Paperback Library's books under an arrangement which gives that publisher first rights to all paperbacks resulting from National-owned properties. These properties include *Mad* magazine; and if you notice such things you will have noticed the latest of the perennial line of *Mad* paperbacks now carry Paperback Library's imprint.)

"This is it! The most daring dialogue that ever appeared in any comic!" screams the back cover dishonestly. "All New—All Now!" another line adds, equally fatuously (the entire book, save Delany's introduction, is reprinted, with appropriate copyright credits given inside). And, on the title page, "Comix That Give a Damn."

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(Just recently National discovered the word the underground comics people had been using—"comix"—and now they are treating it like another of their own inventions.) Finally, the dedication: "This book is dedicated to all the talented, unrecognized people who devoted their lives to an industry which has never been truly appreciated. PERHAPS FOR BOTH THE TIME HAS COME!!! —*Carmine Infantino, Editor and Publisher.*"

The sad fact is that the industry itself has never appreciated "all the talented, unrecognized people who devoted their lives" to it. Neither O'Neil nor Adams merited a cover by-line—on the front, rear, or spine; not even on the title page; their sole credits are on the contents page, where they must share the honors with six others. Nor, I suspect, will O'Neil or Adams be paid a cent of royalties—comics publishers buy all rights to the scripts and art they publish and republish. Comics publishers and those on the business end of the industry have grown fat on these throw-away pieces of pop-culture. Most of the writers and artists are as rich as their last check.

Perhaps the industry deserves to die. It was created with money often less than honestly come by, and has enriched those who deserved it least. But the field—and the concept itself—has ensnared and bemused literally hundreds of young and talented people, most of whom have grown older but no wiser to the ways in which they've been systematically exploited. "The comics" appeal to the young in us—they always have—and have trapped many who saw in the comics a way to remain young, and ended up perpetually involved in the rat-race of deadlines and What-can-we-do-*this*-month-with-*Captain-Wonderful?*

Sadly, the industry has always set its sights too low. Mass entertainment, even when deliberately aimed at 8-year-olds, need be neither illiterate nor without art, as others have proven over and over. (I recently found myself rereading Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* with all the pleasure I once experienced when I heard the same stories from my mother's lap. Enduring art works can be created for any age. Carl Barks' Donald Duck stories are an equally valid example—and existed within the comics industry. They attained a peak of perfection twenty-five years ago which Julius Schwartz is still unable to perceive. Closer yet to home: *Sugar & Spike,* a National comic nominally aimed at their youngest readership, has more wit and charm in a single one of Sheldon Meyer's lovely and sophisticated stories than is embodied in the last twenty years of *Superman.* Ah, but National is reputed to be folding *Sugar & Spike.* . . .) What O'Neil and Adams have achieved, in the "new" *Green Lantern/Green Arrow,* is a minimal level of intelligence—a giant step upward for National, but staggeringly little to brag about viewed overall.

The paperback version makes this quite clear. O'Neil was faced with an intrinsically silly format: The Green Lantern is a superhero in a fantasy world where "will-power" and a magical ring can accomplish virtually anything. Up to this point the hero has fought Evil all over the galaxy, under the aegis of The Guardians of OA—

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who gave him his ring—bopping casually from planet to planet, star-system to star-system, with an occasional side-jaunt into the future, where for a while he kept a spare girlfriend. (I told you it was silly.) Now he's been saddled with the added companionship of the Green Arrow (apparently chosen for the task because "Green" is the first name of both), a minor costumed hero left over from the supporting ranks of the forties (when comic magazines were thicker and featured more than one story an issue) and whose only "power" is to shoot improbable arrows on any occasion.

The gimmick is this: while GL has been off about the galaxy, saving whole races and planets from one doom or another, things have not been getting a lot better here on earth, and finally his nose is rubbed in the fact. The cover says it all: A shambling old black from the Bowery says, "I been readin' about you . . . how you work for the Blue Skins . . . and how on a planet someplace you helped out the Orange Skins . . . only there's Skins you never bothered with—! . . . The Black Skins! I want to know . . . How come?! Answer me *that,* Mr. Green Lantern!" To which our hero mumbles, "I . . . can't . . ."

Now Denny thinks those were pretty good lines—and he's quoted them in public on several occasions. I think they're awful. The sentiments expressed are unarguable, but as dialogue—? It's awful. It's *comic book.*

So is the story from which they came, "No Evil Shall Escape My Sight." There is a plain and simple reason for the failure of both that story and its follow-up, "Journey to Desolation," and that is that comic book superheroes *don't* live in the real world, and *can't* cope with real world problems. This is inescapable, because superheroes are *fantasy,* and real-world problems, like the first story's slum-lord, are not.

The basis on which any reader of the comics accepts the stories he reads is that of the clear separation between the world he lives in and the fantasy world portrayed in the comics. No one believes that Superman or Batman are real people, actually at work somewhere in the world. They're like the fairy tales of our childhood—like the fantasy in this magazine—*make believe.*

To the extent that their make believe world is complex and in many ways like ours, they become more credible. But the line is still finely drawn between fantasy and reality, as tests have proven. Nothing, for example, rings more hollow in the superhero comics than the intrusion of a genuinely real person—the most commonly used is the current President, but a variety of celebrities from the sports and entertainment world have also cropped up. The best of the comics creators, like Jack Kirby, have used a facsimile of our world as the framework for their own mythology. The less talented have found themselves forced, by their own rationalized frameworks, into some remarkable justifications for what takes place in their stories.

When World War II broke out, Superman—who had up to that point settled several brush-fire wars in unnamed little European republics or monarchies—tried to enlist in the Army as Clark Kent and failed because he

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accidentally used his x-ray vision and read the wrong eye-chart. A pretty lame answer for a very real problem: how could the publishers deal with the confrontation between this superhero who could literally fight a war all by himself and *win*—and the biggest armed conflict our world had ever known?

Now, Green Lantern has a ring of virtually unlimited power. It can transport him vast light-years across space in a matter of seconds, obviously consuming great quantities of energy. It can work improbable feats, from rebuilding whole cities, to stopping the motion of planets. It is a virtual *deus ex machina,* held in check only until the resolution of each story. If GL wanted to do something about making this a better world, he certainly could—just like that—in a comic book story. In a comic book story he could replace slums with beautiful cities, and he could erase fear and hatred from men's minds, replacing these with knowledge and love and maybe even wisdom. *Within the context of his comic-book powers, Green Lantern could remake the world.*

But what could he do for an encore? And how could his readers—a great many of them trapped in the deteriorating inner-cities he might so effortlessly (but fictionally) refurbish—relate to him?

O'Neil's solution: confront him with a slum-lord whom he has rescued from a street-brawl under the mistaken assumption that the slum-lord was an innocent victim. The underlying point, though eviscerated, remains intact: GL has been operating on a simplistic Law'n'Order rule-of-thumb—one which just won't work for him any longer. "The world isn't the black-and-white place I thought it to be . . ." he muses.

But, sadly, in the comics it still is. The slum-lord turns out to be a typical comic-book villain, and the "enlightened" Green Arrow says of him "Once a thug, always a thug." The story which begins with a tour of a slum tenement ends in the same old melodramatic nonsense. The second "complete novel" (as the cover blurbs it) is even worse: the villain, a mine-owner and operator, lives in a fantastically armored fortress (surrounded by *mine fields*), served by a bunch of WW2 storm troopers (literally—they speak with German accents and are given to calling their boss "Fuhrer"), and owns the whole town.

Now the problems facing the itinerant miners in this country are desperate: collusion between their corrupt union leadership and the big mine-owners, an occupational disease which goes unrecognized and uncompensated, and sweatshop conditions in hazardous mines which claim lives every year—all this for wages that never seem to give them a chance for anything but lives of endless toil and quiet desperation relieved on weekends with a drunken fling down at the bar. However, don't expect to find *any* of these problems even passingly mentioned in the "relevant" story presented here. It's sheer fantasy, and the plot resolves into the same old "secret collaborator" jazz comics have been dishing out for thirty-five years.

It just won't wash. Taken as exam-

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ples of what National has been turning out in the superhero field, these stories aren't bad. In fact, they're definitely a cut above the norm. Contrasted with what Marvel was doing five years earlier, they rank a poor second—because Marvel slipped its "relevance" into the cracks of admittedly and unabashedly flambouyant stories. And because Marvel's characterization was better, too. But as blurbed and presented here, these two stories fall flat on their faces. "Daring"? Nonsense. "Relevant"? No more so than ever. Indeed, the dragging in (both within the first story and on the back cover) of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, with this dialogue—"On the streets of Memphis a good Black man died . . . and in Los Angeles, a good White man fell . . . Something is Wrong! Something is Killing us all! . . ! Some hideous moral cancer is rotting our *very souls*!"—is pernicious. The rhetoric is cheap and meaningless—and some two years (when it was written—make that four years, now) too late. Within the context of the story, this is just so much easy moralizing. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the story, the protagonists, or what happens to them.

—I think Denny O'Neil is a victim of the system in which he is forced to work. His efforts outside the comics field—for instance, his story in this issue of FANTASTIC—reveal him to be a gifted and sensitive writer. Indeed, he has achieved far greater successes within the comics field since these two Green Lantern stories were written. (I'm thinking in particular of a two-part story on drug addiction which succeeded precisely where these two stories failed; the Green Arrow's kid sidekick, Speedy—an ironic choice of names, but one made in the early 1940's—turns out to be a junkie and for well justified reasons.) And Neal Adams must be absolved of most of my criticisms—his work, especially where he did his own inking, is at the top of his usually high standard. Further, his repasteups for the paperback format make this book the most successful republication of comic magazine work in paperback form I've seen. (It is lacking in only one department: color. I feel the lack of the original added color should have been compensated for with the use of screened overlays, which Adams has proven on other occasions he is adept in using.) The panel-to-panel flow is smooth and effective. The layouts vary from page to page, but never confuse, as they might so easily have done. A few seams show, where inches were added to fill out a panel here and there, but are unobjectionable. In terms of translation—from the 7" x 10" comic magazine to the much smaller book format—the job is wholly successful and quite attractive. (The contrast between Adams' work and the first six-page introductory story—ironically, it is by Gil Kane—is marked. These pages are simply reductions of full-page comic magazine pages, averaging six panels to each page, and so reduced as to strain the eyes.)

The book is numbered as #1—implying that more will follow. Whether or not this volume will launch a series is moot: it has been poorly distributed to date and I've seen it on

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only one newsstand. I would like to see the series succeed, less for the inevitable outpouring of recut and repasted reprints to follow than for the creation of an audience for a more adult form of comicstrip art. But I doubt most adults who might buy this book—if, indeed, many will—are going to come back for seconds. If the hype doesn't put them off, the intrinsic contradictions and failures of the stories will. And if they don't, it will be because the reader in question is already a comics fan and buying the stories fresh, in color, for only two-thirds the cost of the book, from his local comics rack.

—TED WHITE

(Continued from page 21

looked at his watch. It was getting late. Later and later.

"We're almost done," said Macgregor. "I wanted to ask you about your job. What do you do?"

"I work."

"As a civil engineer, according to this." Macgregor tapped the notebook.

"That," Ransom said distinctly, "is a lie. Everything in there is a lie. I don't have a wife. I don't have children. I don't even have a dog. I never did." He stripped off the candystripe bathrobe. Underneath it he wore a spiffy skintight black leather uniform studded with glittering gold. "The truth is that I work for Section-E."

"Section-E?"

"Elimination." Ransom pointed a finger. "We weed out the other sections. You remember that tea you just drank?"

Macgregor seemed mystified. "Tea?"

"It was deadly poison," said Ransom.

"I don't feel a thing."

"You will."

"Wait," said Macgregor. "Is it like a stitch in the side?"

"At first."

"Who developed it?"

"Section-M, Medical."

"Those boys are clever."

"They have to be," Ransom said.

"I assume it leaves no traces."

"That's one of its greatest charms."

"Does it spread to the heart?"

"Rapidly."

A single shiny tear rolled down Macgregor's cheek. "You know something?"

"What's that?"

"I wish they'd let our section wear a uniform like yours."

"Oh, well," said Ransom.

Macgregor clutched at his chest, groaned, doubled up, and fell out of the chair. He spasmed thrice on the pale gray carpet, gasping for air, then expired. Ransom knelt and took his wrist. The spark of life was gone. He closed Macgregor's eyes, a very odd tactile sensation, brushed away the tear, then stood and walked to the phone. Lifting it, he dialed a number.

"Give me two nine two," he said. "Hello? Thornton here. Were you sleeping? So was I. Yeah, cardiac arrest. I'd appreciate it if they came for him in the afternoon. Right. Good night."

He hung up the phone and went back to bed. When they came at eight in the morning he wasn't surprised. He offered them coffee and cola and cynopep tea. They declined.

—ROBERT E. TOOMEY, JR.

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(Continued from page 4)

economic life.

The changing attitude of Worldcon promoters you mention is another serious problem. I don't know whether you intended to give the impression that committeemen receive pecuniary reward for their efforts; as far as I know, all proceeds from Worldcons have been plowed back into the convention, donated to worthy fannish causes, or passed on to the next convention. The problem has been the more subtle one of ego, with a tendency to maximize cash flow as the measure of egoboo. This leads us into the heart of the dilemma, which lies in the motivation of committeemen.

In the past, a simple desire to have a Worldcon in one's own city was enough to elicit the level of effort required. In the last three or four years, however, the amount of labor and the period of time over which it had to be sustained have meant that only those with a deeper incentive have undertaken to bid for a Worldcon. There are a number of forms such motivation could take. You point out the cases of coin-collecting and comic fandom. Here the organizers are the hucksters, and the motivation is promoting their wares. In addition to the obvious shortcomings of such a system, science fiction fandom has an additional problem in that there isn't enough money involved in huckstering to support a convention; hence cons that have depended on huckster support have had to shift to a-comics or movie orientation to make a go of it. Another alternative would be to follow the example of many mundane conventions and have full-time professional (paid) convention organizers. At least one recent Worldcon promoter has seriously discussed the prospects for "turning pro," and hiring out to local fan groups on a free-lance basis. We may eventually be reduced to that, but I think not for a while yet at least.

The problem boils down to one of TANSTAAFL: the people who put on conventions will have to be compensated for their efforts in some way; and, in lieu of either of the above alternatives, the form that compensation has taken has been in the egoboo of handling large sums of money. For the moment, this may be as good an arrangement as any; however, it is not without its side effects. One of these has been the increasing emphasis on the financial and organizational aspects of fandom, in the operations of local fan clubs as well as in conventions. In some cities, with the tacit consent of local fans, an Establishment has arisen consisting of those persons willing to undertake the increasing organizational and financial demands made by the fans. The time may be fast approaching for fandom to make a basic choice: either broaden the base of the Establishment through more and more fans doing more of the "dirty work," or make honest men of those who *are* doing it by paying them in cash instead of ego-boosting authority. If this decision is not faced, fandom may go the way of politics in a Machine-dominated city, where the average citizen has two choices: accept things the way they are, or get out. The option of making even limited changes will be reserved to those willing and able to devote thousands of man-hours in faithful service to the apparatus.

Looking back over what I've written, I may have overly dramatized the situation. But it's worth thinking about. Let's face it: the consequences of "letting George do it" *can* happen here in fandom.

Sincerely yours,
Erwin S. Strauss
1015 Laguna St.
Santa Barbara, Calif., 93101

IN 1967, I WAS CO-CHAIRMAN of the

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NyCon3; the 25th World Science Fiction Convention. The experience was invaluable—and leaves me with no urge to ever take on a job like that again. When Dave Van Arnam and I began campaigning for the convention several years earlier, we promised ourselves that we would revolutionize the annual Worldcons (as they are usually known)—we would rethink and redetermine each and every "traditional" element of convention programming and organization—starting with the bid itself.

Each Worldcon, you see, is put on by a new and individual group of fans. Because the Worldcon follows a rotation plan which determines the area of the country in which it will be held—or the fact that in certain years it will be held outside North America—groups who wish to host the convention in their area of the country must compete for it. Ten years ago someone sat down and figured out exactly how much time and money was going into the campaigns—and at about that point the competition ceased, the areas' competing groups arriving beforehand at an arrangement which led to a single uncontested bid being offered. The system worked for about five years and then the competition began again—reaching a climax of sorts in 1966, when four bids were entered for the 1967 Worldcon. Traditionally the voting occurs at the Business Session of the preceding Worldcon (now altered to the Worldcon two years in advance, to allow more planning time for the victor), and is open to all convention members.

After we had won our bid, we began figuring out what this honor had cost us. We had hosted parties at regional conventions all across the country for more than two years running. We had purchased ads in the 1966 Worldcon progress reports and program book. We had made up banners, lapel pins, shopping bags, and all manner of advertising paraphenalia. And Jack Gaughan had written and drawn for us a special pamphlet, *NyCon Comics*, which we'd published for distribution at the 1966 Worldcon. On a conservative estimate, we had spent well over a thousand dollars—and for what?

The right to put on a non-profit convention, the membership of which topped 1,500, and the advance preparation for which took half a year out of my working schedule. The right to lay ourselves open to considerable acrimonious criticism from side-line fence-sitters who disapproved of the innovations we introduced, despite the fact that we had campaigned on a platform of innovation. (Subsequently these innovations have become sanctified as Tradition.) And of course the right to work so hard on our convention that we could not pause long enough to enjoy it unitl the very last evening, when at last it was all over.

We did most of the things we thought needed doing—tighter and more innovative programming, new awards recognition to fan artists and fan writers, general improvement in the graphics and content of the convention publications, etc. We made our quota of mistakes and were plagued by an uncooperative hotel staff, but in general our convention is remembered favorably by most of its members.

THE FIRST WORLD Science Fiction Convention was held over the Fourth of July weekend in 1939 in New York City, loosely in conjunction with the 1939 New York World's Fair. The title picked for the convention was grandiose—less than one hundred attended, and all were from the U.S. and Canada—but in keeping with the times.

At that time the science fiction community was small and closely linked. Most fans knew each other well—either from personal contact or by extensive correspondence—and a large number of

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those professional sf and fantasy writers who wrote out of love for our field as well. Science fiction was neither understood nor respected by the masses at large, and the sf community was if anything made closer-knit by its microcosmic size. Bear in mind that in 1939 the notion of a rocket carrying men to the moon was self-evidently absurd, and you had to be a little crazy to take the idea seriously enough to read (much less write) stories about it.

Times change. Over the years the sf community has greatly swelled. Fandom—hard-core sf fandom, excluding the fantasy-movie fans and the comics fans and the monster fans and the Star Trek fans and the *etc.*—probably numbers over one thousand today. (Add all the aforementioned quasi-sf fans and you can run up a list of over *six thousand* people—as the original publishers of the *Dallascon Bulletin* in fact did.) The Science Fiction Writers of America, a group which allows membership to anyone who has sold any sf in this country, has close to five hundred members. Not among these members are at least a dozen well-known sf writers who have had differings of opinion with the SFWA and an unknown number of others who have written sf but not chosen to join or been unaware of the SFWA's existence.

What was once a small, fraternal community, capable of assembling in one small meeting room, has grown over the years into a mass of many hundreds. Necessarily the sense of community, of closeness, has become attentuated. And, concommitantly, the World SF Convention has swelled enormously—in size, in cost, in complexity and in responsibility. At this point, we are at a crossroads. Either the Worldcon can "go pro," as Strauss suggests, or it can make an attempt to reverse the tide and move into a smaller arena once again. There are, of course, objections to both alternatives, and the more likely course will be the continuation of the present *laissez faire,* while the Worldcon continues to just grow, like Topsey. . . .

ERWIN STRAUSS BRINGS UP several points deserving of comment, not all of them attractive to consider.

The first is the continuing affiliation of the Worldcon and the Hugo Awards. Inasmuch as the Hugos were launched by the Worldcons of the mid-fifties and have been a permanent part of them ever since, I doubt very much that the two will ever be totally separated. However, an administrative divorce might make good sense. As has been suggested in our letters pages by readers like Jerry Lapidus, it might be wise to set up a permanent Hugo Awards Board, whose task would be to conduct the Hugo balloting, deal with the trophy manufacturing process, and perhaps conduct the actual awards presentation at the Worldcon (traditionally, Hugos are awarded at the main banquet, known these days as the Awards Banquet).

Attempts have been made in the past to set up continuing committees in fandom for similar purposes. (One, in the early sixties, conducted polls for fan awards. It actually functioned for only one or two years, the awards were announced in a special fan publication, and were marred by the biased editorial comments by the publication's editor—who was less than pleased with some of fandom's choices.) All have fallen apart for the same reason that the World SF Society, Inc., an organization which was to take over the administration of the Worldcons, failed. Fans are an anarchistic bunch, taken on the whole, rarely given to long-term cooperation, and all too often prey to petty-political power plays. Then too, fandom is for most fans a hobby—not a life's career. Most fans

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maintain an active interest in fandom for a period of about five years, after which they will have been drafted, left college and gone to work, or gotten married. Or, sometimes, just lost interest. Although a hard core of long-term fans exists, they can only rarely be gotten to cooperate on a project, for various reasons (some of them are long-time enemies, their mutual dislike going back perhaps thirty years to a time when they were adolescents; others have adopted the attitude that fandom should be enjoyed on a relaxed, non-organized basis, and resist attempts to create monolithic organizations of Grand Purpose).

In any case, while a separate, continuing, Hugo Awards Board is not an impossibility, it will probably depend upon the energy and enthusiasm of one person to get it going, and unless it can survive him it will last only for as long as he does. This is not terribly promising, inasmuch as the incentive for anyone to do this is limited. If he does the job for the reward of seeing it done, sooner or later the workload will overwhelm whatever gratification he is getting from the recognition the job brings him (or, in fannish terms, the egoboo he is getting). If he does the job for financial remuneration, he is going to lay himself open to charges—both irresponsible and otherwise—that the profit motive may be corrupting his objectivity in administering a by-now prestigious set of awards. (Even if he doesn't stand to gain financially, there will be those who will attack him for "seeking power" through his position—and, considering the actions of some fans in the past, they might be right.)

At present it does not seem to me that much is to be gained through the establishment of a separate Hugo Awards Committee. The workload would be lifted from the regular Worldcon Committees, but it isn't that heavy a load even now (and in 1967, it probably occupied no more than two working days, in total).

The second point in Strauss's letter is that of size and expense in present-day conventions. He makes one common error of assumption, however, when he says "Many potential bids may have been aborted when the would-be organizers went into shock on hearing what hotel space would cost."

I believe that this "hotel cost" factor is one which recent committees have bruited about in explanation of their rising membership fees. If so, they are deliberately deceiving fandom. In actual fact, hotel space for a convention the size of the Worldcon is free.

That's right: the grand ballroom, the meeting rooms, the artshow display rooms and huckster rooms come free—gratis from the hotel. What's the catch? The number of rooms rented to convention-goers. Modern commercial hotels make their profits from convention business—and rarely let a week go by without booking a convention. Most conventions, in fact, are booked from two to five years in advance! (This is why bidding for future convention sites was pushed up a year—too many hotels were being booked up too far in advance.) The convention facilities, as well as the use of a hotel workforce to set up chairs or tables for meeting rooms, etc., are donated by the hotel on the basis of the number of regular hotel rooms rented. At one time a minimum room guarantee was required but for the last five years at least this has been unnecessary—the hotels are all well-aware of the business we have brought them in the past (they maintain complete books on us) and can now fairly accurately estimate the attendance and the number of rooms which will be rented to Worldcon members. Although the Worldcon does not rank with such all-out conventions as the American Legion, the

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Shriners, and that sort, it does rank in the top 10% of conventions held in this country. The hotels are well aware of this and actively solicit our business, often underwriting portions of bidding campaign expenses, and often wining and dining bidding committee members in an effort to bring the Worldcon to their hotel.

It is true, however, that the Worldcon has outgrown all but the largest commercial hotels in most cities. In 1961, the Seacon, Seattle's Worldcon, was held in a Hyatt House just outside the Seattle airport. It was actually a large motel, complete with central pool. Since the convention membership was around 300, the hotel had no difficulty finding sufficient rooms and a meeting room large enough. But a modern Worldcon of 1,500 to 2,000 attendees would find that hotel impossibly small and totally inadequate.

In the mid-sixties Chuck Crayne, the present co-chairman of the 1972 Los Angeles Worldcon, wrote a fanzine article in which he yearned for a Worldcon so large that it would be split among several hotels—with a regular shuttle service running between them. (I attacked the idea then, and I still strongly dislike it today.) In 1968, the Baycon fell into almost exactly that circumstance: the hotel booked was the Claremont, an old-fashioned resort hotel of considerable charm in the Berkeley hills, but much too small as it turned out for the large number of convention attendees. The result: those who didn't get their reservations in early found themselves booked at other, none-too-nearby hotels and motels. A volunteer shuttle-bus service was set up, but it was awkward and inconvenient nonetheless.

Clearly bigness has its limits. We run the very real danger of exceeding the space or facilities available in any major hotel—and as we approach this limit, we eliminate a number of more moderately-sized hotels. Not only is it possible that, size aside, these might be hotels better suited to our peculiar needs, but when we are left with but a single hotel available for us, the lack of competition between hotels makes it much harder for us to drive a good bargain with the hotel management. (Negotiable points: room rates, banquet costs, various special services.)

The third point: "I don't know whether you intended to give the impression that committeemen receive pecuniary reward for their efforts; as far as I know, all proceeds from Worldcons have been plowed back into the convention, donated to worthy fannish causes, or passed on to the next convention."

This is a polite fiction. When we won the bid for the 1967 Worldcon, a nameless gentleman who had chaired a previous Worldcon took us aside and advised us that we should reimburse ourselves liberally for the expenses we had incurred in bidding (over a thousand dollars, as I mentioned earlier), as well as any lost income we might suffer due to convention work. He assured us this was a common practice and had been for some years. I have no reason to doubt him. It's not spoken of in public—this is, to the best of my knowledge, the *first* time it's been stated in print—but the financial reports of the Worldcons have long been doubted by those who read the fine print. And, since 1963, no Worldcon has even issued a financial report. (One convention chairman tried to hold all the surplus funds for his forthcoming marriage that year—it took threats of exposure to pry from him the usual donations to fannish charities and the customary pass-on to the next convention—known as "the working nut," and usually two to five hundred dollars.) One Worldcon committee—one which expressed the desire to hold the Worldcon *every time* their area was eligible—dined weekly at the con-

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vention hotel throughout the year preceding the convention, at the convention's expense.

Depending upon the degree with which a Worldcon committee rewards itself, this practice can be considered fair and reasonable. The actual work involved—especially correspondence and paperwork—is considerable, and not much fun. Those committee-members whose jobs allowed it have taken effective leaves of absence (or, in my case, I simply got less of my paying work—writing—done) for which they undoubtedly were not fairly compensated. A dinner once a week isn't much when the mortgage payments on your house fall into arrears.

However, when we were let into this little inner-circle secret, Worldcons were grossing a relatively small amount of money, and the left-over profits to be disbursed were only a few hundred dollars (from which the usual fannish causes were usually given around five hundred dollars, total). The "pecuniary rewards," then, weren't much.

Today Worldcons are grossing between ten and twenty thousand dollars—almost an embarrassment of riches. Sometimes, due to the cliff-hanging aspects of a convention's finances (and the fact that most of the bills are tendered up to three months after the convention itself), a Worldcon Chairman can be convinced that he is operating in the red, only to find himself with a surplus of several thousand dollars after all the bills are paid. The question of what to do with this surplus can be vexing and he may be pardoned if, after lavishing a handsome sum upon all the charities in sight, he decides the last thousand or so should go to him or his committee. By that point it begins to seem only fair.

But the line between a thousand-dollar windfall and the deliberate profiteering of thousands from a supposedly non-profit convention is thin and vaguely defined. And we are rapidly approaching it. Present-day convention membership fees are grossly inflated—and the surpluses have been an embarrassment to recent Worldcon committees, who pleaded their need for these fees, only to find their critics had been correct all along.

It is my feeling that, inasmuch as the bulk of Worldcon attendees are young, college and high-school students and operating on small budgets, all possible membership expenses should be pared to the bone. I believe that, for instance, the membership fee for an attending membership should be reduced to $2.00—$3.00 at the maximum. Further, I believe that hotels can be more sharply bargained with for lower room rates, especially for groups of half-a-dozen or so who want to have extra cots put in their room. Banquet prices can be cut by one-third simply by holding the banquet in the afternoon instead of at night. Etc. As I have stated in the fan press, advertising in the Worldcon's progress reports and program book should cover all pre-convention expenses. And a more realistic fee for the huckster tables (where profits of over a thousand dollars are now common) would also raise the money for necessary convention expenses (like hired guards for the display and huckster rooms; a requirement in recent years to halt pilferage by both attendees and hotel personnel).

THIS BY NO MEANS covers all the points Erwin Strauss brought up in his letter, but the limitations of space for this editorial necessarily demand a halt at this point.

Next month, in the July issue of our companion magazine, AMAZING SCIENCE FICTION, I will discuss the immediately looming potential for the corruption of

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the Worldcon, as fans of dubious reputation and demonstrated avarice move in—and also the choice of alternatives which awaits the Worldcon in the present decade.

ISSUES PAST & FUTURE: Our printer has been quietly experimenting with brighter inks for our covers for some months now—you may recall the Todd/Bodé cover last October with its very bright yellows—but last issue we pulled out all the stops and framed Mike Hinge's cover painting with a brilliant fluorescent "Arc Yellow" ink—one which glows under ultra-violet ("black") light. That was our second "fluorescent" cover, the other being that on our March AMAZING.

Our purpose in trying out these special inks is not, of course, to provide mini-posters for those among you who use u-v lighting for decorative purposes in your home or room—but simply to provide a brighter and more attractive cover under all circumstances. Those who browse outdoor newsstands in the larger cities, for instance, will discover that these same special inks also become brighter in sunlight, and are eyecatching even under usual drugstore lighting conditions.

These "day-glow" inks cost us a premium price, however, and the question of their continued use is one only you can answer for us. For that reason, I'd like to ask you to write me and tell us exactly what you think about the use of these special inks. Had you noticed anything different about these covers? Did they seem brighter—more visible on the stands? Did you find them attractive? And—would you like to see us continue using them?

Your answers, and the eventual sales figures on those trial issues, will tell us whether or not to go ahead with these inks. If you want them—and your response is backed by sales—they'll be back. Write us—let us know what you think.

Next issue is our gala 20th Anniversary issue. To celebrate the occasion we'll have a number of surprises for you, but here are two I just couldn't hold back: Our lead story of the issue will be a brand new Conan novella by L. Sprague de Camp and Lin Carter—*and* we'll be featuring a brand new Conan cover painting by Jeff Jones!

But that's just the teaser—we'll have a lot more! Don't take any chances on missing our 20th Anniversary celebration—it's the one you've been waiting for!—

—TW

(Continued from page 17)

from the pseudo-Gothic spire, clad in stone robes, burdened with stone wings, smiling a placid stone smile, as though he enjoyed Grandpaw's little joke—the real Mister Cherubim, at last.

—DENNIS O'NEIL

COMING IN AUGUST FANTASTIC
(On Sale July 6th)

The **BIG 20th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE,** featuring **AVRAM DAVIDSON'S** great NEW NOVEL—**THE FORGES OF NAINLAND ARE COLD, L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP and LIN CARTER'S** outstanding NEW CONAN NOVELLA, **THE WITCH OF THE MISTS** and other unusual NEW stories and features.

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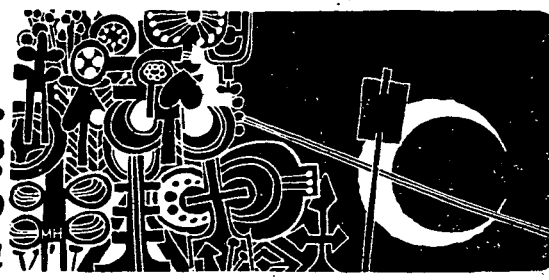
... According to You



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to According to You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.*

Dear Mr. White,

I read with much interest Mr. Panshin's column for the December 1971 issue on SF and academia, because, as an academic scholar and teacher of science fiction and as a member of the executive committee of the Science Fiction Research Association, I am very much one of those people he was talking about. I don't wish to comment directly on the column, which speaks well for the fears and hopes about SF's future from the fan/author point of view. I thought you and your readers might be interested in some personal detail on what this particular academic is up to and why.

My professional training is in political science, specializing in international relations, and that is the subject with which I began my academic career. But ever since high school days, I have been a heavy reader of SF and when the new field of futuristics—the study of alternative futures—opened up a few years ago, I saw a golden opportunity to combine my hobby with my work in the context of studying international political futures. And so, for the last three years, I've been teaching courses at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland) titled "Alternative World Futures," "Utopias," and "Science Fiction and Social Policy." As the latter title indicates, I treat SF in my classes from the viewpoint of the social sciences (somewhat different from the English Department perspective, the usual locale for SF courses). My students and I investigate what SF authors have to say about both probable futures (predictions) and possible futures (visions) relevant to current and future policy problems/opportunities (such as urban life, international relations, and the social control of technology).

In the meantime I have also become the science fiction book reviewer for *Futures* magazine, a professional journal of forecasting and planning published in England. Through this medium and the various articles I've written about SF I am doing my best, you might say, to make sure that SF will never again be *only* a fannish activity by spreading the word about the importance and utility of SF to colleagues in academic and non-academic policymaking positions (of course, nothing prevents fans from continuing their endeavors within the larger SF family). Surprising as it may seem, there is not much overlap between the futuristics and SF people. Some people now engaged in forecasting for fun and

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profit do have SF backgrounds (Joe Martino, Dan Fabun, Harry Stein), while some SF writers are called on from time to time to lend their talents to exploratory projects (Asimov, Pohl, Anderson). But in general, I see my role as a necessary middleman between these two groups because I think they need to know, or at least know better, about each other.

I am aware of the possible dangers to SF itself in thus opening it up to outside scrutiny, but I believe it important to take the risk. My basic motivation stems from my knowledge that a great part of the input to the people in the think tanks and government agencies engaged in planning is based on quantitative material and implicit assumptions about the beneficence or continuation of technology. I want them to have other inputs as well. So I tell such people to read SF to get a feel for the way trends interlock to produce unanticipated consequences (hard to see in a graph), to appreciate the possibilities of changing social relationships, and to gain insight into the hopes and fears of the present (the real subject of much of SF).

Will reading SF result in more humane and democratic decisionmaking from those in positions of influence? I don't know, but it's worth a try. At the same time, everybody else has to get in on the act of planning the future we want, so I spread information about teaching SF to the many people in schools and colleges who are eager to start courses in this. Here especially, it is important that SF warnings about the unimpeded advance of technology and hopes for enhancing human potential reach a school-age audience.

Thus, significant as it may be, the founding of SFRA is only one part of a larger movement. We are not just at the beginning of an influx of academic types going into SF research, but perhaps also at the verge of the purposeful use of SF, for better or worse, in policymaking institutions. There are important moral and ethical implications here that have scarcely been discussed in the SF magazines and conventions, but I hope informed debate on the "proper" uses of SF will also be part of the new SF scene. I intend to arrange a panel on these matters at the next Secondary Universe conference (October 1972 in Des Moines).

DENNIS LIVINGSTON
Center for Marine Affairs
Scripps Institution of Oceanography
Box 109
La Jolla, CA 92037

I think the direction you've taken was inevitable, and probably necessary as well. But in skimming over the very interesting paper you enclosed, "Science Fiction as an Educational Tool" (which I note is to appear in Alvin Toffler's Learning 21, *Random House), I see absolutely no mention anywhere in it that science fiction is published in magazines as well as books, or that any magazines might be devoted solely to science fiction. This continuing concentration on books to the exclusion of magazines—especially when presenting a case for sf to non-sf-oriented people—seems to me difficult to justify, and all the more so when you are yourself a continuing reader of the magazines. We (and I speak for all sf magazines) perform many functions which are unique within the field—the Panshins' column is only one example—and it seems unfair that the academics have concentrated so exclusively on other aspects of the field.*—TW

Dear Sir,

David Wm. Hulvey speculates in the December issue that the counterculture is discovering SF. As a long-time reader of SF (I have bought and read almost everything since 1957) and a long-time member of the "counterculture," I would assure your readers that SF readers are

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more than adequately represented among this group. When I was first in college back in '63 and first discovered the joys of grass and anarchist politics, we would get stoned and spend hours remembering and recounting the various SF stories we knew. When I was a campus traveler for SDS during '65, my best method of breaking the ice on the various campuses that I visited was to spend time rapping about SF. When I was with the Berkeley Provos during 1967 and worked with the Free Med Clinic in the Haight during '68-9 the easiest way to immediately establish one's credentials was to discuss SF.

Although it is risky to generalize on the basis of personal experience, it is fairly safe to say that SF and the "counterculture" have been closely linked over the past nine years. The relationship of SF fans to the "counterculture" is an entirely different question. Despite the fact that I have had only fleeting contact with fandom, I would venture that fandom remained surprisingly insulated from the "cultural revolution." Reading reports of fanac, it seems that only within the last four years has fandom noticed that the world was changing. In general, from outside it appears that fans are relatively conservative.

Thanks, by the way to you, Ted, for developing a magazine with departments that interest me as much as the ones in my callow youth in the fifties did. The fiction even seems to be improving.

WALT MILLIKEN
412 Bellevue #3
Oakland, CA 94610

Science fiction appeals, I think, to people of a wide variety of political persuasions, and sf fandom undoubtedly mirrors this fact. But sf is revolutionary in one basic sense—it takes for granted change *and demands of its readers an open mind about the future. No doubt this is the basic reason for the wider readership for sf among members of the so-called "counter culture."*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

Your review of Lundwall's book was a lot closer to my opinion than P. Schuyler Miller's in *Analog*. I read sections of it to a friend and he couldn't believe it. He said, "He *couldn't* have read the same stuff we did!" His comments on Heinlein alone are so little reflective of the actual works in question as to be beyond belief. "Anti-Negro philosophy," "there is an absolute non-portrayal of any reasonable female," and "goodness is weakness, altruism is treason, honesty is death" bear no relation to anything by Heinlein I've read, which covers almost all of his writing. After coming up with all sorts of weird accusations for Heinlein's books, Lundwall then calls *Stranger in a Strange Land* "a very mature work," which is indicative of Lundwall's idea of mature writing, but still says "I distrust this novel as much as his other ones."

Lundwall seems obsessed with sadism. It got so it seemed every page had at least one accusation of it after a while. His opinion of sword and sorcery stories is that "the sex urge has been turned into violence and death." Conan is supposedly full of sadism and nul-sex; he kills women, children, and "old bootmakers" with gleeful abandon, and in between these diversions commits rape, which is unusual in view of the anti-sexual orientation he sees. Lundwall's high spot of interpretive reading is probably his view of Tolkien. Sam is a "wiseacre servant," Frodo returns to the Shire and puts down the "revolting lower classes (aptly described as some kind of sub-human creatures)," and Sauron's empire is a "symbol of industrialization, socialism and all the dangers of the new age." In his opinion Tolkien writes for "fat little bald men."

His philosophy is "what was good then must not necessarily be good now," rather a marked contrast to Carlyle's "Nothing that was worthy in the past departs; no truth or goodness realized by man ever dies or can die; but is all still here and,

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recognized or not, lives and works through endless changes."

You said you doubted we needed this book in your review. Well, I think that we'd be better off without it. Anyone who doesn't know about sf, that "favorite relative" you mention, will come away from this book firmly convinced that all sf, whether in books, comics, or movies, is fit only for certified idiots and the heavy-breathing type who subscribes to *Leather Lovers Quarterly.* Think of the effect the book could have on "academic serconism," which Alexei Panshin says is coming. Lundwall is an insider, a fan, so his opinion would have weight and color their judgment. I can't understand Wollheim's and Miller's praise for this book; it seems highly irresponsible to me.

While it is undoubtedly true that fandom represents only a very small part of the buying public, as you say in your response to Dave Hulvey's loc, they are the source of a very large part of the pros. Maybe a majority . . . I don't know. Are there any figures on how many pros came from the ranks of fandom? At any rate, while an editor can ignore the fans now because they are so few, in a brief time they will be the actual shapers of the field, and he will in effect be at their mercy.

When Campbell was alive I often wished he'd drop dead. Now he's dead I've changed my mind. I considered him an obstruction in the field; now I realize he was preserving valuable qualities. I only hope the new editor of *Analog* will carry on as Campbell did. Christ, what a year! Steel Savage, Virgil Finlay, John Campbell, and August Derleth gone. Er, how do *you* feel lately?

JOHN LEAVITT
Maple Avenue
Newton, N.H. 03858

It's hard to say how many professional authors were previously sf fans. Most of them were certainly readers and "fans" in that sense, but only a minority were ever active in sf fandom. No intelligent editor ignores the fans, but all are aware that fans have special biases—in part the result of their intense interest in sf and their extensive reading in the field—which the bulk of the readership may not share. In any case, the vast majority of active sf fans do not go on to become professional authors of sf, and those who do have their own unique contributions to make, so I don't believe fans, as such, will ever become "the actual shapers of the field."—TW

Mr. White,

I received my copy of the December FANTASTIC STORIES a bit late this time; I guess my subscription renewal came in a bit late (I *hope* it came in) and the distribution, once barely passable around here, has gone to rather dismal. I'm going to subscribe to every prozine I can get my hands on.

As for the short stories you ballyhooed, they are an improvement over what gets published here the rest of the time. But none of them really satisfied. "The Awesome Menace of the Polarizer" was interesting, but Rod Marquand seems a little bland to be the subject of a series as you would suggest (unless the whole thing was done for laughs). Your own story, "Things Are Tough All Over," should have shocked me; this type of story usually does. But you just didn't do it right. It wasn't that the ending was predictable. It wasn't. But when the climax came, I really didn't care. Perhaps using the first person viewpoint harmed the story too. His calm description of his murders helped to deaden the story (I don't think I should have used that choice of words). I didn't really understand "Cartoon." I don't really understand most of the short short stories in your magazines. They always seem to be missing something that would give me a hint as to what was going on. Which is really a pity, because your short-shorts are always well written otherwise. "Garden of Eden" didn't seem very original to me; that's the basic reason for its failure. "Wires" wasn't really a

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short story. More like a sketch, and I believe a segment of C. S. Lewis' *Perelandra,* a monolog by the character Weston that appears near the end of the book, may have inspired the story, since they both seem to have the same bitter despairing mood about them. Anyway, it is rather good, but it should be classified as, say, a prose-poem instead of a short story.

Now that I have read "The Dramaturges of Yan" in its entirety, I find it an interesting, but far from flawless, work. The novel should have been developed further before the climax was reached; the characters talked an awful lot in order to explain everything to us (an annoying fault in much sf), and not nearly enough explanation was given as to why Chart and Morag Feng went insane at the end of the book. You don't just go insane at handy times so the author can get rid of you; there are different types of insanity, and different causes. I don't remember more than half a sentence being devoted to why they went insane, and I have difficulty excusing that.

JIM MEADOWS III
62 Hemlock Street
Park Forest, IL 60466

Dear Ted,

As December comes upon us, the thoughts of us unreconstructed serconfen naturally turn to Hugo nominations, and in particular to that most important category of all, Best Novel. Thinking back over 1971, I was most discouraged to find that the year seemed to be a lean one indeed as far as major works were concerned. Silverberg's *Son of Man* seems assured of a place on the ballot, but for me, although it was a masterful exercise in creative writing, it failed as a novel. But what else had there been? While I was in the midst of this quandary, gazing into the void for a worthwhile contender, along came the December FANTASTIC with the second half of John Brunner's fine novel, "The Dramaturges of Yan." I do believe you have solved my problem! I thoroughly enjoyed this excellent novel and, unless something remarkable comes up in the next three weeks, it will have my Hugo nomination for 1971. Congratulations on obtaining this for FANTASTIC!

All in all, this was a damn fine issue. A superb cover painting worked most effectively into a graphically powerful cover (one of your best layouts to date, I think), plus some fine fiction. While I enjoyed Piglet's very clever story, it was Jay Haldeman's piece that moved me the most; if this is his first story, you're certainly right to predict a major future for him. (Your own story, while very well written, I found a bit predictable. Not that this in any way lessened the horror of the concept.) The issue as a whole was a commendable success and more than justifies what was, I suppose, an experiment on your part.

Now a quibble about a matter over which you have no control but might perhaps have an explanation for. Why this recent 25% increase on the price of your magazines in Canada? At a time when the U.S. dollar is at its lowest value in years, it could hardly be ascribed to currency differences. Does it cost so much more to send AMAZING and FANTASTIC to Toronto than it does to send them to Los Angeles? Or is it simply another part of Nixon's economic squeeze on Canada? It's bad enough that we're constantly bombarded with orders that "Canadians remit in U.S. funds" (although it's a very rare American who's thoughtful enough to obtain Canadian funds when buying things *from* Canada) without having to pay an extra sizeable percentage of the going price. Is Sol Cohen trying to induce Canadian cultural paranoia?

Luckily your magazines are *worth* the price (also, luckily the print on the "75¢

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-in Canada" is small enough that most store owners don't see it, but we won't mention that, will we?). I'm sorry you didn't win a much deserved Hugo in Boston, but the way I look at it, quite a few nominees who *ought* to have won came in third. Maybe next year . . .

Lastly, as a fan and collector of science fictional art and as the owner of quite a few cover paintings from your rival magazines, I'm interested to know who retains possession of your cover paintings? *If* the magazine has them, is there any chance that they might come up for auction at a convention some time?

MICHAEL GLICKSOHN
32 Maynard Ave., #205
Toronto 156, Ontario, Canada

Looking over the novels we published in 1971—Poul Anderson's "The Byworlder" and John Brunner's "The Dramaturges of Yan" here, and "The Lathe of Heaven" by Ursula K. LeGuin, "The Second Trip" by Robert Silverberg and "The Wrong End of Time" by John Brunner in AMAZING *—it's hard to ignore any of them in considering Hugo nominations. As for the higher price in Canada, I am not sure of the precise details but I know that Canadian customs imposes a variety of red tape on imported magazines, and that until we raised the price we were losing money on the copies we sold there. (You'll note a variety of magazines do charge more in Canada if you check the fine print on their covers. If the dealer misses this fact, he is the one who absorbs the loss; if you value his store you'd best point out the true price to him next time.) Finally, we return our cover paintings to the artists, who sell us only first reproduction rights. You'll have to deal with them individually if you want to obtain any of our paintings for auction at your upcoming 1973 World S.F. Convention in Toronto.*—TW

Ted,

I hate to be the one to break the bad news to you, but FANTASTIC's circulation has dropped a rough 6 thou since last year. I also see that not as many copies were printed. Could it be that because of the new binding process and other improvements on the mag you had to sacrifice 6,000 issues? I love the way the mag is now, but if it means that 6 thousand hungry souls won't be able to read this month's FANTASTIC, by all means go back to the old cheapo paper. Enough gripes. I just got the February issue yesterday. If FANTASTIC is not the best fantasy magazine in the field today I'd like to hear about it. This is good news, but then again it's bad news, considering the fate of other good fantasy mags like *Coven 13, Witchcraft & Sorcery,* and *Forgotten Fantasy.* Oh well. The Elric story was beautiful; keep the Sword & Sorcery coming. I laughed like hell through Rich Lupoff's story (I'll bet it could have gotten a chuckle out of old H. P. himself!) and enjoyed Susy Doenim's yarn. A good handling of the old blob from outer space theme. The idea of having a portfolio in the mag is good; try to get some Finlay or Paul. Say, did you hear any of Cat Steven's flying saucer based songs? "Longer Boats" is really great. Speaking of SF in rock, did you hear Jefferson Airplane's "War Movie" from the Bark Album? I recommend it; it ranks up there with other SF songs like Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush" and Matthew Moore's "Space Captain" (as sung by Joe Cocker).

ED LESKO, JR.
Megins Rd.
Rockaway, N.J. 07866

The cut in the number of copies we print had nothing to do with the change in printing and binding. Our distributor virtually dictates what we print by limiting the number of copies to be accepted for

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distribution. Naturally, when the number of copies put on sale is cut, some places stop receiving copies at all—as many of you have written to tell me over the last year. And this, in turn, means that we sell less copies too. It's a vicious circle, because lower sales lead the distributor to accept even less copies for distribution—etc. Hopefully, we've bottomed out now; and the ratio of copies printed to copies sold is somewhat better.—TW

Ted,

"Death Card" stunk, for very commercial reasons.

Bad endings, plotless fiction, etc. These do not sell magazines.

Another point on the same story of which I am sure you are aware is that this particular story type has been worn to death in the so-called "little magazines" to the point one has to half-sole characters to even pretend of having found a new angle.

I don't second guess your judgment. I suspect it to be an experiment on your part, and I respect you for attempting innovation. However, I feel (strictly personal judgment) that a story devoted in total to how so-and-so got an aneurysm is a great waste of time—reading time.

I'll look twice before reading any future Ken McCullough stories and send a suspicious eye your way should they be in either AMAZING or FANTASTIC if they are like this one.

In looking through past issues of both A and F, I find two names repeatedly in the letter columns: Cy Chauvin and Jerry Lapidus. It is amazing and fantastic that both should find so much to say. Or should I say, find so much space to say so little?

That isn't very nice.

And since we're on the subject of AMAZING and FANTASTIC (note: the editorial we is a habit I picked up somewhere and can't shake, but we use it with full knowledge that few people speak for anyone more than themselves and seldom as much as that. Don't we?)

Anyway, about AMAZING and FANTASTIC—when will you or Sol get around to realizing that those names turn people off at the newsstand?

San Pablo is the American hub of science fiction and fantasy fandom, and the local vendor is well stocked. Aside from the copies I buy, the supply is never depleted. So what's the problem?

Don't know how you see it, but a twenty thou circulation on. FANTASTIC tells me people just aren't picking it up. One reason might be that name. It scares them away.

Additionally, Science Fiction on the cover scares people. Although they might think they would like to see inside they won't risk the odd looks from clerks to buy something many were told as kids was junk—so much of it was, then.

The covers are pretty, but they are hardly in line with modern selling concepts. Right?

O.K. So I've said what I think is wrong. How about a positive suggestion towards solution?

One might be changing the name of one of the mags to Future Confessions, running a full page pic of J.K.O. sans clothes and blurbing there for all the world to see, "Will O Going Drag Break up Jackie's Marriage?"

But that's hardly practical. So what else?

How about laying out a few bills each month for a name guest columnist (Ralph Nader, Bill Buckley, Richard Bentley, or George Muskie) to do a short piece on something of the distant future, using their name for the cover blurb, then hiding the SF so those not looking for it won't see it and using a cover design which is both attractive and eye catching? Readers could supply better names.

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Is it asking too much that A and F use such selling methods to keep themselves solvent? I think not. I think rather the readers deserve assurance of the mags' continuance.

Such methods will get the mags into hands not normally in the market for SF or Fantasy and draw more regular readers.

When the mags' pockets get full and many of those forty thousand plus copies which aren't selling begin to, then a little advertising can be both bought and sold.

Yes, I can see the day when A and F are as common as *Reader's Digest.*

That may be hopeful vision, but it is not Dangerous Vision. Right?

Or is the world yet ready for science fiction?

MARGRET TICKLEBRIDGES
2600 Mission Bell Dr.
San Pablo, CA 94806

You pique my curiosity—just what do you think are *"modern selling concepts"? Do you really think that people want to be tricked into buying this magazine—or that, once tricked, they'd come back to buy again? "Death Card" seems to be proving that old maxim about one man's meat and another's poison; see the next letter for another view of the story.*—TW

Mr. White—

"Death Card" by Ken McCullough in your February issue was so great just had to write and say so—sf has often seemed far behind the mainstream in style—but McCullough's story is right (on) in there. Imagery and personal reality—although I wasn't sure it was sf or even fantasy, except in a very subjective sense.

Anyway, I loved it—felt would be a better word—and thanks for printing it.

Oh—and about *Tombs of Atuan*—read the shorter version in *Worlds of Fantasy;* found Tenar's head changes very believable, understandable—and dug Sparrowhawk's slight intangibility (because that's what he was to her—not-quite-real) (Is intangible what I want? Yes). Am aware, however, that I may have perceived story differently because I'm a female and see like a female, like Tenar and Mrs. LeGuin.

Enough. If you think McCullough would be glad to know some freaked out reader liked "Death Card," you're welcome to print this letter.

EDITH MOSBACHER
712 W. Grace St.
Chicago, Illinois 60657

Dear Ted,

I just found a copy of the December FANTASTIC—about a month late. The idea of doing a Guilford Conference issue is really great, and ought to sell a lot of copies—why hasn't anyone done something like this before, like from Milford?

I noticed one thing, though, in your editorial about writers' groups and conferences—you never said who puts on the Guilford Conference or how to go to one. Is this a carefully kept secret, or did you just overlook it? Well, here's to many more Guilford Conferences and Guilford Issues of FANTASTIC!

WILLIAM SPEER
16 West 16th St.
New York, N.Y. 10011

You're right—having given Jay and Alice Haldeman credit for the Guilford Conference in the previous (October) issue, I completely overlooked the fact that nowhere in the Guilford Conference Writers' Issue itself did I mention the fact that Jay and Jack C. Haldeman II are one and the same, nor that he is the founder and host of the Conference. My apologies to the Haldemans for that. However, although the Conference is hardly a secret any longer, attendance is still by invitation only and necessarily limited to less than a dozen. And I suspect your own difficulty finding a copy of that issue may be a reflection of the fact that sales on the December,

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1971, issue dipped by 5,000 to an all-time low—a fact which, however coincidental, pretty much precludes any future Guilford Conference issues, I'm afraid.—TW

Dear Ted:

Unlike some of the ingenious readers of FANTASTIC I have not yet evolved a rating scale for the stories. However, the shorts in the February issue were decidedly on the weak side. I would've had to mark you down a bit if I did the rather ingenuous rating business. Even though McCullough showed bright flashes of artistry, I'm afraid I found more superficial form than substance in "Death Card." The image of Gillespie's death was very strong, the build up convincing, but I was left with an ultimately unsatisfied feeling after the end. It's instinctive, but I don't frown on instinctive analysis, even in this age of the triumph of detached objectivity and bland rationality. Technically, McCullough is indeed "the find of the year." I'm only left a bit stranded as to where he is headed with his talent. The writer seemed to move in mysterious circles that obscured, rather than illumined, just what it was the story was supposed to tell, or say, or mean. Damnit, it's very hard to pin down the emotional failure of this fiction. For me, at least, it's more for the emotions to puzzle with than for the cerebral scalpels of a master critic—I wish one of the better masters of SF criticism would set forth at least a few general comments on your prozine fiction. A master critic such as Panshin could most probably deal with the odd emotional reaction I got from McCullough's story without missing a beat. Would he?

Though I consider myself somewhat an enthusiast of avant-garde jazz (Sun Ra, Pharaoh Sanders, Soft Machine and the Coltranes, with vague exposure to a few others) I couldn't get into John Brunner's "Djinn Bottle Blues." I liked it well enough, but not enough to justify its position as lead off short story. He created the atmosphere of the jazz subculture a bit, but there was a spark missing from the story. Though the characters stood well, they didn't quite communicate the spark that the story reflected a microcosm of American life in its own unique style. The SF element *seemed* almost gratuitous, even though it wasn't. Jazz fantasy is a rare subgenré though—all told, even if this story wasn't completely satisfying, it was a nice contribution to this rather rare combination. By the by, what was the name of that jazz fantasy by you and Terry Carr? I would be much interested in looking it up, and perusing it.

Surprisingly, I liked "Exit to San Breta" without qualification. My jaded ol' sensawonda came through for me. Martin evoked in me a genuine reaction of eerieness.

Both "After the Last Mass" and "Timmy Was Eight" were essentially minor. I'm glad to note a fan making it in professional prose though. Many fans like to scoff and deny it at great length, but they'd give quite a lot to be able to metaphorically rub shoulders with the likes of Brunner between the pages of a prozine. Ebert is probably the envy of a lot of fans tonight for his success. His use of Ireland for a setting makes me surmise he must have been active during the last great faanish era. I assume, perhaps rightly, that he knew the prose of the Irish John Berry and imitators firsthand. Susan Doenim, on the other hand, probably has some croggled because of her age. I'm pleased to see, even though the work was a bit unsure of itself, a bit stilted, that she possesses the coherence to make it in FANTASTIC. I don't dare predict what the future may hold, but I hope such youthful precociousness is encouraged.

Richard Lupoff's latest addition to the

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saga of Ova Hamlet was disappointing. I read a much better Lovecraft parody in a recent fanzine. I'm sure you saw "The Call of Oxydol" by Jim Turner in *Starling* #19. It used the same overdone—for our time and place—prose of Lovecraft without being as boringly repetitious as Lupoff. Though Lupoff captured the essential characteristics that are potentially worthy of pointed satire in the Lovecraft style, Turner did a better, more imaginative job of spoofing them tongue-in-cheek. I commend your readers to compare the two parodies (you can perhaps still obtain a copy of *Starling* #19 from the publishers cum editors: Hank & Lesleigh Luttrell/1108 Locust St./Columbia, MO 65201 for 35¢ or something . . .) Turner also took to task Lovecraft's Victorian sexual hang-ups much more humorously than Lupoff's cursory sketch of them through the use of the college girls. Lupoff is much better at the satiric art than this when he does his usual superb work. His LoC in *Bab* 19 was nothing short of inspired in its subtle intent. I await more work from Ova Hamlet which is more successful in its endeavor.

"Reality" was fair. I didn't really need it, but then I suppose it was pleasant enough to fill a few idle minutes. The idea seems too much a gimmick with the moral that "things are better just like they are." You bet.

I'm sure Jerry Lapidus will make note of the portfolio, but without trying to guess his reaction, I'll venture to say it's very fine indeed. However, Jerry is much more interested in graphics, art and related fields while I hardly mention them. The written material is my own first love.

DAVE HULVEY
Rt. 1, Box 198
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Obviously "Death Card" is among the most controversial stories we've published recently. You have mistaken Brunner's "Djinn Bottle Blues," however; I'm sure John never intended it to "reflect a microcosm of American life," since it was quite obviously written about the trad jazz scene which still exists (and flourished strongly until recently) in London. (I blush to admit that I no longer recall the title of the jazz fantasy Terry and I wrote—we wrote it in 1962 and ultimately sold it about five years later to a minor men's magazine, long after having given it up as unsalable.) And, yes, we've encouraged Susan Doenim to the extent of buying her second story, "Heartburn in Heaven." It's pretty heavy stuff for a sixteen-year-old girl.—TW

Dear Ted:

The Science Fiction Club at the University of Maryland is presently lobbying for the creation of a credit course in Science Fiction Literature in our English Department.

To facilitate the presenting of a coherent program to the head of our English Department, we would like to learn of current courses being taught at other universities. Therefore, if any of your readers happen to be teaching a credit course in Science Fiction Literature, I would be interested in learning about their teaching methods, subject matter, and books used.

STEPHEN F. RYNAS
1024 Quebec Terrace, Apt. 102
Silver Spring, Md. 20903

Dear Ted,

The redesigned contents page and feature headings give FANTASTIC (and AMAZING, too) a much more modernistic appearance—only *Analog* is more nicely designed. I think that those fans—from Dick Geis on down—who felt that neither magazine was worthy of an award due to their shoddy appearance—should no longer have reason for complaint. Variation in the interior layout of the magazine would seem to be the last frontier, and I have no doubt that there'll be an im-

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provement in that area eventually.

It was nice to have a large supply of short stories rather than a serial for a change. For any reader who buys sf regularly (whether in book or magazine form) it becomes rather tiring to read the same sort of thing over and over again, in the same old format by the same old writers, no matter how well executed. I've always felt that one of the strengths of a sf magazine (in comparison to a book) is its ability to present a wide *variety* of material all in one package. I think that gives it more appeal.

I have a hard time deciding which story I liked most; it boils down to a choice between "The Sleeping Sorceress" by Michael Moorcock and Ken McCullough's "Death Card." I've always enjoyed fantasy stories, so Moorcock's effort was interesting, but it somehow seemed to lack depth—I think that epic fantasies are generally better if they are long, since it takes a lot of space to develop a complete fantasy world properly, to make it feel "real." (Of course, if I had read the other stories in the Elric series I might have caught the references to previous adventures and thus not have felt this way.) "Death Card" on the other hand is completely different but just as good. The story has an interesting and immediately involving style which draws you right into the characters' psychological conflict. I only wish I had caught the fantasy element of the story, since there doesn't seem to be one—or at least any important one. After reading this story and comparing it to Moorcock's, though, the question that pops into my mind is, why doesn't someone write a sword & sorcery story with a style similar to that used in "Death Card"? I get rather tired of the semi-archaic inflection that nearly all the sword & sorcery writers use—I suppose it's part of the atmosphere of this type of fantasy story, but it seems to have become a sort of cliché.

"Djinn Bottle Blues" was a delightful, lightweight fantasy, and I'm glad John Brunner found a home for his jazzy little gem . . . I didn't particularly care for the Ova Hamlet story this issue, however. Hamlet's (or rather Lupoff's) piece really isn't any better than the type of story it is trying to parody—and since an awful lot of horror stories are boring, *it* is boring. I suppose that's the chance you take when writing a parody—the end result may be as bad as the thing you are trying to satirize. Susan Doenim's "Timmy Was Eight" didn't scare/excite me either, but at least it wasn't such a chore to drag through. And there was a certain vivid reality and freshness in its details which made it interesting. Both "Exit to San Breta" and "After the Last Mass" are stories with old themes that are given a new, fresh twist. An extra plus goes to Roger Ebert for even fooling *me* with his clever little surprise ending. Most of the surprise endings in sf stories are about as surprising as rats in a cheese factory—you become so used to the standard props and clichés that you can guess the ending a mile ahead. (In the better stories, of course, that doesn't matter—it's the ride that counts.)

Both Alexei Panshin's and L. Sprague de Camp's columns are *extremely* good. I had complained before about Alexei's column since it seemed that he was only repeating himself with this bit about speculative fiction/fantasy, but now he has gone off in a much more interesting direction. Besides A. E. van Vogt, I suspect that Philip K. Dick is another writer who has a lot of subconscious underpinnings in his stories. At least, that would explain the extreme negative and positive reactions people get from his stories (note the two opposing articles on him in *Speculation* 29). As far as de Camp's column goes, it was interesting to have a less-discussed writer for a subject this time. Howard and Lovecraft have been talked

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about which a lot, but I don't think anyone has ever written anything on Dunsany. By the way, do you know if there will be any article on William Morris forthcoming?

And before I forget, I want to thank Mike Nally for the exceptionally fine illustration he did for "Death Card." More from him, please!

CY CHAUVIN
17829 Peters
Roseville, Michigan 48066

Dear Mr. White,

February FANTASTIC is the most attractive and balanced issue you have put out since you took over editorship. Kaluta finally came through with a superior cover. After looking over the covers of your mags of the last two years, I rate this one No. 1. Hamlet/Lupoff's parody was a bit overdone and overlong. Admittedly, Lovecraft had many literary weaknesses, despite which he managed to write a few horror classics. To play with these weaknesses is fun, but not for approximately nine pages. However, Hamlet/Lupoff did inject some tasteful, even if broad, humor into Lovecraft's "xenophobia" (a subject which L. Sprague de Camp dealt with very well in his HPL article).

Keep up the good work on both mags.

TOM FULLING
346 Beech Ridge Rd.
York, Maine 03909

Dear Mr. White,

I am writing this in protest to your reply to Daniel Tanenbaum's letter in the February FANTASTIC. I don't think that the rising costs of world conventions has anything to do with greed of the con committees.

The cost of labor and materials to produce the Hugos has, of course, risen tremendously since the awards were first given out in 1953, and I'm sure they're far more expensive today than even four years ago (when you co-chaired Nycon III).

As you must well know, printing costs have also gone up, which made the Noreascon program book more costly to produce than Nycon's. And remember, there were far more fans at Noreascon than at Nycon III, so that meant that more program books had to be printed. The greater number of attendees also meant a greater number of mailings, and with increased postal rates, you have another huge expense.

As for hotel rates, I'm sure that you couldn't find a hotel with $10-a-day rooms that could host a 2000-plus-member convention with any reasonable service. There were almost no complaints about the Sheraton-Boston. No one was complaining about the hotel's rates. And those who couldn't afford rooms crashed in the lobby or the movie room and the hotel made no move to stop this.

I agree, $10 is a lot to pay for a con; that's why I joined a year earlier and only paid $6. I'm sure that most of the people that ended up paying $10 could have paid less if they didn't wait until the last minute, because the jump in price occurred only a *month* before the con, and ample warning was given prior to that date. Even if a person wasn't sure whether or not he could attend, he could have bought an attending membership for no more than the final supporting fee or bought a supporting membership for only $4.

If people can't afford to go to a con, then they shouldn't go. There have been so many cons that I had wanted to go to, but I didn't because I couldn't afford to. I'm in the financial position where I'd be lucky if I could attend three cons a year. It's just a sacrifice one has to make.

JERRY BOYAJIAN
9 Savin St.
Burlington, Mass. 01803

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Sorry, but you're wrong. Item: the Hugo awards are manufactured by a continuing group of people who make large batches of them at a time and sell them at cost to successive conventions. The metal ones may cost more than the lucite ones they gave us in 1967, but the cost of the Hugo awards is a minor part of convention expenses. Item: it cost the Noreascon less, *on a per-book basis, to print their program books than it cost the NyCon3. Noreascon used a Texas printer (who also did the St. Louiscon books in 1969) whose rates were considerably lower than NyCon3's printer. (The Texas printer is still, I understand, available to upcoming Worldcon committees.) Item: Program books, like progress reports, should pay their own way—the costs of printing, of postage—with the advertising carried. Ad rates can be adjusted to cover increased postal rates, etc. Noreascon's ad rates were considerably higher than NyCon3's, and the NyCon3 did not lose money. Item: The Sheraton-Boston's room rates were as much as five dollars higher than the rates Noreascon promised when presenting its bid for the convention. There* were *complaints. Item: Not everyone who wants to attend a Worldcon is necessarily aware of it and its escalating rate-structure years in advance. And had someone bought an early supporting membership for $4, he would have had to pay an additional* six *dollars at the door to attend. If people cannot afford to go to a Worldcon because the Worldcon has been made twice as expensive to attend than it was only five years ago, whose fault is that? And just who* should *be making the sacrifices? For more on this subject, see my editorial this issue. And the next letter you write me "in protest," I suggest you double-space as I've requested (at the beginning of every letter column) and save me the time and trouble of retyping your letter, Jerry.*—TW

Dear Sirs:

Only a demented mind could evolve such a ridiculous concept as the "Cthulhu Mythos." Lovecraft perpetrated the existence of ancient malign gods seeking entrance into our time-dimension in his stories, and actually believed such as true! The decadent ruins, the cults, rites and "secret" writings were real to him, and in his fiction he preached their existence.

He was a quack, a fake, and a madman; his stories utter nonsense.

I applaud your renouncement of him. He is *not* to be taken seriously.

Elder Gods indeed!

A. ALHAZRED
(no address given)

Dear Mr. White,

I see that FANTASTIC is twenty years old this summer; the incorporated FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is of course thirteen years older. That the youngest of the major SF magazines has now two decades of publication behind it must be a cause for some celebration and nostalgia.

The summer 1952 FANTASTIC, "The New Quarterly Magazine of Classical Science-Fantasy!", came out on March 21st of that year, according to an advertisement in a contemporary AMAZING. Ten days later there had been enough consumer response for the magazine to be put on a bimonthly schedule—which must be some kind of record—and, all in all, 169 issues have been squeezed into the twenty years up to (and including) June 1972, more issues, strangely enough, than *If* (born March 1952) has so far managed. FANTASTIC's success must, I suppose, have helped "big brother" AMAZING STORIES to make the change almost a year later from pulp to digest size; might not SF magazine number one have otherwise tried to continue as a pulp, and come to a sticky end like *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and its companion, *Startling Stories?*

FANTASTIC has had, over the years, a

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good number of outstanding novels and novellas; by Poul Anderson, Keith Laumer, Fritz Leiber, Philip K. Dick, Roger Zelazny, Avram Davidson, Jack Vance, Piers Anthony, Randall Garrett, and Chad Oliver . . . plus other notable contributions by Sturgeon, Asimov, Galouye, Barrett, Jakes, Chandler, Brunner, Moorcock, Aldiss, Farmer, Simak, Russell, Leinster, James White, Herbert, Neville, Anvil, Budrys, Disch, Silverberg, Young, you yourself . . . the list could go on, to include very nearly every SF writer worth reading.

Congratulations, FANTASTIC! Congratulations and thanks to Howard Browne & Ziff-Davis Publications, Paul W. Fairman, Cele Goldsmith Lalli & N.L., Joseph Ross and Sol Cohen, Harry Harrison, Barry N. Malzberg, and Ted White. Monthly (as opposed to bi-monthly) fiction magazines may not be practicable anymore, but I suppose one can still wish for a page-count increase when the 75 cents price comes (as come it must), and a back-up FANTASTIC (Adventures?) QUARTERLY to take the last of the reprints. *F&SF* has a celebration every year; may we hope for something special when fantasy's final stronghold reaches its twenty-first birthday?

MARTIN J. S. LOCK
33 Chester Road, Northwood
Middx. HA6 1BG, England

Yes, indeed! Next issue will be our 20th Anniversary issue, and to help celebrate it we'll have on hand a brand new Conan novella, "The Witch of the Mists," by L. Sprague deCamp and Lin Carter, the beginning of a new fantasy novel by Avram Davidson, "The Forges of Nainland Are Cold," a generous helping of new short stories, and features by the Panshins, deCamp—and, returning to Fantasy Books *at last, Fritz Leiber!* Plus *a brand new Jeff Jones cover painting! Next issue is certainly one you won't want to miss, so stay with us—we've only just begun!*—TW

(Continued from page 9)

time. And dress like an artist. It's great."

In the second room there was a guitarist and half-a-dozen people sitting and singing. Smith edged around them. He was suddenly feeling cold and removed. Every step was on a stair that wasn't there.

The kid he had come with and a couple of girls were seated at a cluttered kitchen table. Somebody else was mixing orange juice.

He felt the need to sit down. There was a kitchen chair in the corner occupied by an orange cat. He displaced the cat and sat down heavily. He tried to concentrate. He wasn't quite sure where he was, or why.

THE MAN FELL upward or sideways or down through a timeless fog. Since the falling had neither beginning nor end as referents, it would be as accurate to say that he floated. He existed and knew that he existed, but there was no feeling of up or down. There was only unsettling suspension.

Time passed. Or perhaps no time passed. There was no way to measure time in this place. Eternity and a single clock tick were equal.

He saw nothing. If there had been light and color, it might have been gray here, or the palest of blue, but there was nothing to see. There was only the feeling that something to see was just beyond his power, but though he strained it eluded his gaze. He strained his hearing, but there was nothing to hear. Not even quiet. He called out.

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He yelled. There was no sound, no feeling in his throat, and in the timelessness of it, he could not even be sure if he had called at all, or merely thought of calling.

His mind was clear. He knew who he was. But where was he?

Then he had it. Party. Witches. Devil. His bargain.

He had wanted immortality, but what was this? He was still himself, but the world had changed. It was hardly the immortality that he had had in mind.

"Ah, damn you!" he might have cried. There was no echo, no response, no way to know whether he had.

Or was he damned, and this limbo hell? He wanted immortality, but within a world. Not this nothing. Or had he been warned? Was this the only possible immortality—to be wrapped safely against all damage and placed outside the universe out of the way of all harm? No death. No abrasion. No friction. No interaction. No life.

Here there was no feeling, no temperature, no pressure, no direction, no movement, no sight, no hearing. Nothing. He simply continued.

And he was frightened.

If he could have run, he would have run. He would have hid. He would have yelled. He would have begged.

"No. Not this. I want it to stop. I don't want to play."

But nothing happened.

Eventually he ceased all effort to do, or move, or even to think, and floated or fell in lonely, singular desolation. Eternity continued.

Then, at last, or instantly, he thought of the words:

"I want to die."

"HERE. DRINK THIS."

There was the specific taste of cold orange juice in his mouth. The kitchen was warm and he was aware of that.

A damp, chill glass was pressed into Smith's hand and his arm was aided to raise the glass to his lips. He swallowed and the juice was sweet and good to taste.

He raised his fingers slowly to his forehead. It was damp and cold, too, but solid and real.

His vision was blurred, but he could see. He could hear singing in the next room: "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"

"Are you all right? Are you feeling better?" It was the kid in the jeans with the yellow cavalry stripe. The girls with him were bending over Smith in concern.

With difficulty, but savoring the words, Smith said, "I think so."

"Man, were you freaked out. You had us worried."

Smith nodded. He looked around the warm, grubby kitchen. Littered table. Empty soda cans. Orange cat sitting on the floor gravely staring back at him.

"I'll be all right," he said. And thought he would be.

He spent two hours later that week daubing a pair of khakis. Artistically. He was pleased with his first flowers with petals like stained glass. It was something to do until he thought of something better.

He was all right. He would be all right—at least until he died.

—ALEXEI PANSHIN

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